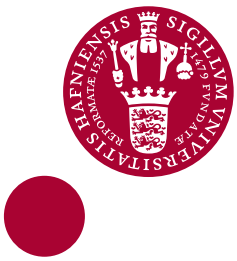

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This Ph.D. thesis, comprising a brief dissertation and four articles, was submitted to The Academic Coordination Committee, The Faculty of Food, Human Nutrition and Basic Science, The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Frederiksberg, Denmark, on December 2nd, 2002. It was accepted for public defence March 2003. The public defence will take place on May 7th, 2003, at 14.00 o'clock in Auditorium A510, The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Frederiksberg, Denmark.

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This work is dedicated to the memory of my friend Frances (‘Franco’) Dorr (1943-1995), philosopher and teacher, whose graduate work concerned a critique of Polanyi’s theory of tacit meaning from the standpoint of the Canadian philosopher, Bernard Lonergan.

Here is one early memory. As an undergraduate student, Franco was invited to read a paper to a class of 16 & 17 year old bricklayers’ apprentices at a Dublin technical school on the topic: ‘Are there proofs from reason for the existence of God?’ Having decided to accept this somewhat odd challenge, her response as expressed to me was: “Gosh, and now I have to go about this in the right way, don’t I? So, can you come into town this afternoon? I am going to need a smashing new mini-skirt...”

Contents

Part II: 4 articles

Acknowledgements

This work was undertaken in the course of a three-year appointment to a temporary position as Assistant Professor at the Department of Human Nutrition, The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Denmark. While the position carried the usual obligations, it left me free to choose my area of research without the burden or limitations imposed by the need to obtain external funding. This made it possible for me to pursue one of the issues I deem fundamental to the development of a sociological theory of food practices, for which I am very grateful. The work has been carried out in accordance with the norms of this university, whereby a Ph.D. thesis usually comprises a small number of related articles supplemented by a brief dissertation. As a member of staff who might reasonably be expected to have obtained a Ph.D, but had not in fact done so, I was asked to submit such a thesis.

Acknowledgement of some funding should nevertheless be made. A grant received from the National Food Agency, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, to Associate Professor Lotte Holm had funded the collaborative work on which the first of the four articles comprising this dissertation was subsequently based. Likewise the collection of empirical data, upon which the second article is based, was facilitated by a grant from the Cancer Foundation to Jytte Halkjær, research student at the Dept. of Human Nutrition. This grant enabled us to obtain professional services regarding the recruitment of subjects to focus groups.

Lotte Holm collaborated with me in the production of the first of these articles and also supervised the rest of my work. To her I am especially grateful for the unflagging support she offered me regarding my right to pursue my selected problem for investigation to the limit and to find a theoretical approach that could throw light on that problem. This was the case even at an early stage in that process when it was far from clear whether readings in the area of metaphor theory and cognitive semantics might, so to speak, bear sociological fruit. I am also grateful to my colleague, Jóhanna Haraldsdóttir, and our common research student, Jytte Halkjær, with whom I collaborated in the production of the second of these articles. Jóhanna's supportive interest and questions were always appreciated, while Jytte's commitment to resolving the difficulties of qualitative analysis in cognitive sociology was a source of inspiration. I would also like to thank my other colleagues in our department, who

commented on drafts and contributed criticism: Janus Hansen, Trine Iversen, Else Kloppenburg, Søren Tange Kristensen, Jesper Lassen, Terkel Møhl and Per Dissing Odgaard. The latter also contributed valuable assistance with the production of figures and other technical tasks, while the ever-competent secretarial assistance given by Vinni Dahl Steffensen was greatly appreciated.

I wish to acknowledge helpful suggestions with particular regard to relevant readings made by Ass. Prof. Seanna Coulsen, University of San Diego, Prof. Colwyn Trevarthen, University of Edinburg, Prof. Mark Turner, University of Maryland, and not least by three friends, philosopher Frank Dorr, Dept. of Health, Cork, Ireland, cultural sociologist Ninna Kiessling, former Rector of Suhr's Educational College, Copenhagen, where I was employed for many years, and psychologist Alice Theilgaard, Prof. (emeritus), University of Copenhagen, each of whom read and criticised early and lengthy drafts of my work and suggested further readings - for which I remain extremely grateful.

Two settings have yielded me the opportunity to explore non-discursive, inter-personal meanings, and have served to strengthen my conviction that the illumination of eating habits and cuisine on the part of the social sciences must be based on an understanding of non-discursive processes of communication. One of these settings is my three-person study circle, the monthly meetings of which never fail to provide both insight and inspiration. I am duly grateful to its other two members, Gry Kirstein and Alice Theilgaard. The other setting has been offered by bi-annual meetings of the Network for Inter-Disciplinary Studies of Music and Meaning, funded by the Research Council for the Humanities, Denmark, and led by Assoc. Prof. Cynthia Grund, University of Southern Denmark, Odense. This setting has allowed me to encounter a Danish community of blending theorists from a variety of disciplines, including scholars who share my concerns and enthusiasms. Several other settings have also given me the opportunity to present my findings for discussion. These include: the consumer network of the European Sociological Association, the seminar series for graduate students at University College Cork, Ireland, the British Sugar Bureau, UK, the seminar series for members of the cancer research unit at the University Hospital at Malmö and the University of Lund, Sweden, as well as courses for Ph.D. students in Denmark includig those on 'Gender and Medicine' held at Panum Institute, Copenhagen University, and on 'The Body and Culture' held at the University of Southern Denmark, Esberg.

Lastly I would like to thank the members of my immediate family, my husband

Bernard and my sons Daniel and Samuel, each of whom tends to support whatever I do. That is not something I underestimate.

Summary

The objectives of this work are: (1) to develop a conceptual framework regarding the cognitive operations at issue in the construction of implicit meanings, as expressed in food practices, and (2) to apply this framework to the analysis of empirical data regarding patterns of food practice, such that interpretations and explanations of these data can be undertaken by explicating the implicit meanings of these practices.

The theory employed is drawn from ‘conceptual metaphor theory’ and ‘blending theory’, both of which have made major contributions to the development of cognitive semantics and cognitive science during the last two decades. These frameworks, which were developed with reference to language practices, are further developed with a view to rendering them applicable to non-discursive data. The framework developed on this basis regards the concepts of: ‘gradient blends’, ‘gradient mapping’, and ‘performative metaphor’ with reference to conceptual and gradient blends.

This conceptual framework is applied to the analysis of existing empirical data regarding: (a) patterns of gendered food preference and consumption in industrialized societies during the last 3 decades, with a view to explicating social actors’ discenments of gender-appropriate food practices, and (b): conceptions of the ‘proper dinner’ in British food culture, with a view to explicating the meaning construction underlying this conventional meal.

The work comprises four articles, two of which are published and two of which will shortly be submitted for publication in abbreviated form, as well as a minor dissertation. These articles have respectively contributed: (1) a review of empirical social research regarding gendered food preferences and consumption practices, which yielded the problem for investigation, (2) an empirical study of food categorizations, which contributed to the development of the conceptual framework, (3) a presentation of the conceptual framework and its application to the explanation of gendered food consumption, (4) the application of this conceptual framework to a re-analysis of empirical data regarding the meaning of a conventional meal. Apart from presenting the problem for investigation and clarifying the relationship between these four articles, the dissertaion also presents the theories that have been drawn upon in the course of this work and some implications of its results.

It is concluded that the development of a conceptual framework regarding the

construction of implicit meanings in non-discursive social practices contributes to the development of sociological theory of food culture and food practices by providing conceptual tools that can be fruitfully applied to the analysis of empirical data, by suggesting a direction that could fruitfully be taken with regard to the development of a theory of non-discursive practice, including consumption practices, and by suggesting some directions for future research with particular reference to the phenomena of style, as expressed in non-discursive cultural practices.

Dansk Sammendrag

[Summary in Danish]

Målet for nærværende arbejde er for det første at udvikle en begrebsramme vedrørende de kognitive aktiviteter, der gør sig gældende i konstruktionen af implicite betydningsdannelser i forbindelse med madpraksisser. Det er for det andet at bringe denne ramme i anvendelse ved analysen af empiriske data vedrørende mønstre i folks madpraksis, således at der kan fremlægges en fortolkning og forklaring af disse data ved at gøre eksplicit de implicitte betydningsdannelser, der findes i disse praksisser.

Den brugte teori er især inspireret af konceptuel metaforteori og blendingsteori, der begge inden for de sidste par årtier har bidraget afgørende til udviklingen af en kognitiv semantik og kognitionsvidenskab. Disse teoridannelser, der er udviklet med henblik på at analysere en verbalsproglig praksis, er søgt videreudviklet, således at de også kan anvendes i forbindelse med ikke-diskursive data. Den fremlagte analyseramme vedrører i første række følgende nøglebegreber: 'graddelte blends' (gradient blends), 'graddelt kobling' (gradient mapping) samt 'performativ metafor' (performative metaphor).

Den nævnte begrebsramme er anvendt ved analysen af foreliggende empiriske data inden for to felter. Det drejer sig for det første om kønsspecifikke mønstre ved valg og forbrug af mad i industrialiserede samfund inden for de sidste tre årtier, hvor sigtepunktet er at klarlægge aktørenes evne til at identificere, hvilke madpraksisser er passende for et bestemt køn. Det drejer sig for det andet om forestillingen om 'det rigtige måltid' inden for britisk madkultur, hvor sigtepunktet er at klarlægge, hvordan betydningsdannelse finder sted i forbindelse med et traditionelt måltid.

Afhandlingen omfatter fire artikler, hvoraf to er offentliggjorte, og to vil snarest blive offentliggjort i en forkortet form, samt en afhandling. De nævnte artikler har ydet et bidrag på fire felter. Det drejer sig (1) om den forskningsoversigt over empirisk samfundsfaglig forskning om de kønsspecifikke forbrugsmønstre i forbindelse med mad, der oprindelig var med til at klarlægge, at der er gode grunde til at iværksætte en undersøgelse af den valgte problemstilling. Det drejer sig (2) om en empirisk undersøgelse af måder, hvorpå mad kategoriseres - en undersøgelse, der bidrog til udviklingen af den brugte begrebsramme. Det drejer sig (3) om en redegørelse for den udarbejdede begrebsramme og dens brug til at forklare et kønsspecifikt madforbrug. Det drejer sig (4) om anvendelsen af denne

begrebsramme til en fornyet analyse af de foreliggende empiriske data vedrørende et traditionelt måltid. I afhandlingen gøres der rede for den styrende problemstilling, for forholdet mellem de fire artikler, for de teoridannelser, der er søgt udnyttet og udviklet som led i dette forskningsprojekt samt for dets videre perspektiv.

Det kan konkluderes, at udviklingen af en begrebsramme for studiet af de implicitte betydningsdannelser i ikke-diskursive praksisser er i stand til at bidrage til udviklingen af en sociologisk teori om madkultur og madpraksis. Det sker ved at tilbyde et begrebsapparat, der kan bruges til at analysere empiriske data, foreslå en frugtbar måde, hvorpå der kan ske en udvikling af en teori om ikke-diskursive praksisser, herunder madpraksisser, samt identificere fremtidige forskningsfelter, når det drejer sig om de stilfænomener, der gør sig gældende i ikke-diskursive kulturpraksisser.

The Contribution of Cognitive Semantics to the Development of Sociological Theory of Food Culture and Food Practices

PART I
Dissertation

1. The Clarification of a Problem

> "The Lele's idea of toxicity in foods was based on their social categories and on the aptness of animal classes to symbolize them. When someone fell sick, it was suspected that he or she had broken these dietary rules. If we were to follow such a system it would be as if we associated children with a diet of milk and fruits, adolescents with burger and coke, women with salad and tea, men with steak and beer; we would attribute illness to a person having strayed into the wrong gastronomic class."
>
> Mary Douglas 1983:77-78

The purpose of this brief dissertation is to present the problem for investigation that underlies the four papers which follow,[1] to characterize the theory and conceptual framework employed, to clarify the relationship between those papers as applications and developments of that theory, and to draw out some central implications for social and cultural research with regard to food practices. These four papers are presented and discussed in the chronological order in which I have written them. The first paper reviews empirical research regarding gendered food practices with reference to consumption. Since it presents the issues which gave rise to the problem I set out to investigate, these issues and the character of this problem are presented at the outset. The following three papers, taken up later, pursue related aspects of that problem and each addresses an empirical issue with regard to food practices. In these papers I employ a conceptual framework drawn from theoretical research in the fields of cognitive linguistics and cognitive science, summarily referred to here as 'cognitive

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[1] These four papers, reproduced in Part II, are as follows:

(1) O'Doherty Jensen K & Holm L (1999): 'Preferences, Quantities and Concerns: Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the gendered Consumption of Foods'. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 53, pp. 351-359; this volume: pp. 65-91.

(2) O'Doherty Jensen K *et al.* (2001): 'Food Categorization: A Key to Understanding Cognitive Difficulties in Responding to Food Frequency Questions' (manus. pp. 28. To be submitted for publication in abbreviated form.) This volume: pp. 92-120.

(3) O'Doherty Jensen K (2002a): 'Gradient Blends: The Art of Discerning and Doing the Appropriate Thing'. In: Anders Hougaard & Steffen Nordahl Lund (eds.): *The Way We Think*, Vol. I, Odense Working Papers in Language and Communication, No. 23. Odense: University of Southern Denmark, pp. 245-265; this volume: pp. 121-138.

(4) O'Doherty Jensen K (2002b): 'Accounting for the Implicit Meaning of a Cultural Convention: The 'Proper Dinner' Revisited from the Vantage Point of Blending Theory' (manus. pp. 43. To be submitted for publication in abbreviated and amended form.) This volume: pp. 139-182.

semantics'. In one of them the attempt is also made to develop that framework.[2] These three papers are presented and discussed (Section 3), following a presentation of the theory and conceptual framework employed (Section 2). Finally, some implications of this work for the development of sociology of food are considered in the concluding section (Section 4).

1.1 *Puzzling Issues with regard to Gendered Food Practices*

Food practices are gendered. This is most clearly apparent in three social contexts: the traditional segregation of men and women in the work tasks of primary production, the traditional division of labour in domestic settings, whereby the task of cooking is exclusively accorded to women, and the gendered character of consumption in societies in which food consumption is regulated by taboo.[3] The latter point is illustrated by the quotation from Douglas, which heads the opening of this section on the previous page.

During the last three or four decades, it has become increasingly apparent to nutritionists and epidemiologists that food consumption in modern industrialized societies is also gendered. That is to say, significant differences between the eating habits of men and women have been observed in the findings of dietary studies. Since it is quite clear that taboo is not the mechanism by which dietary habits are regulated in these societies, the question has arisen as to how these differences are to be understood and explained.

It was on this background that the National Food Agency in Denmark contacted Lotte Holm of the Department of Human Nutrition at The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University in 1996, requesting a review of sociological research regarding gendered food practices in industrialized societies. The interest of the Food Agency was focussed on the question of whether public nutrition campaigns should be planned in such a way that some campaigns would be targeted towards men and quite different campaigns towards women, if it was considered that each had different needs with respect to information about recommended dietary habits. It was thought that insight into the socio-cultural contexts of

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[2] O'Doherty Jensen 2002a.

[3] O'Doherty Jensen K & Holm L (1998): *Mad og Køn i Socialt og Kulturelt Perspektiv: En Litteraturgennemgang.* København: Veterinær- og Fødevaredirektoratet, Ministeriet for Fødevarer, Landbrug og Fiskeri.

these food habits would yield a more adequate basis on which decisions could be made, than that yielded by dietary studies alone.

In fact, it had also become increasingly apparent to sociologists of food that preferences were gendered, particularly in regard to men's preference for meat and women's preference for vegetables (*cf*. Bourdieu 1984; Charles & Kerr 1988; Fiddes 1991; Jansson 1993; Adams 1994; Fürst 1995; Lupton 1996). The requested review, undertaken in cooperation with the present author in 1997-'98, revealed that small scale quantitative and qualitative studies undertaken in many different parts of the industrialized world during the previous twenty years had identified a wider range of foods as being implicated in gendered preferences, and this range corresponded very closely to that identified by dietary research (see Fig. 1). It was also clear that these foods functioned as markers of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' respectively in a manner that was norm governed.

	Women	**Men**
Preferred products:	Fruit	
		Alcohol
	Vegetables	
	White meat	Red meat
	Fish	Meat products
	Sour-milk products	
		Potatoes
	Sweet foods	
Preferred main meals:	'Light' meals: For example: salad, soup, omelette, a vegetarian dish, or sandwich	'Solid' meals: For example: meat, potatoes, vegetables and gravy

Fig. 1: Patterns of preference in gendered food consumption

Women tend to express preferences for fruit, vegetables, poultry, fish, sour milk products, sweet products and light meals comprising a sandwich, omelette, salad, soup or vegetarian dish, while men have a pronounced preference for alcohol, all meat products, especially red

meat, and more solid meals, as compared to the lighter variety. The available results confirmed that men and women tend to consume proportionately more of the products and meals preferred by members of their own sex and in some cases actively avoid the products preferred by and identified with the other sex.

This review of the literature concluded that patterns of consumption in industrialized societies are such that the same food products and kinds of meals appear to function as symbolic markers of the same gendered status positions from one such society to another.[4] Moreover, in the more detailed report prepared for the Food Agency, it had been made clear that the same range of foods also appeared to be implicated in the gendered division of labour in commercial as well as domestic settings. For example, not only is a preference for meat discerned as a 'masculine' preference, both the slaughtering of animals and the carving of meat as a domestic task in private homes are traditionally accorded to men.[5] This pattern suggested to us that some deep-seated issues must be at play in the relationship between gender and particular kinds of food and beverage.

The published review devoted little space to the presentation of explanations of these norm-governed practices, and no space was given to our criticism of the explanations proposed in the literature. Given our dissatisfaction with these explanations, however, we proposed a new approach to the task of explanation.[6] This will be re-stated here following a brief consideration of the available explanations. Broadly speaking, they fall into two groups.

One approach focusses on the question of *why* food practices are gendered, and the explanation that is proffered is based on functionalist premises. The function of gendered food practices, it is held, is that of maintaining gendered status positions. Food products are accorded the same status as their consumers. Men maintain their relatively higher social

[4] O'Doherty Jensen & Holm, 1999, p. 357; this volume: p. 83.

[5] O'Doherty Jensen & Holm, 1998.

[6] O'Doherty Hensen & Holm, 1999, p. 357; this volume: p. 84-85.

status by avoiding the products typically consumed by women and children. Barthes had been the first to advance this explanation in the mid-1970s, and a similar line of argument has since re-appeared at intervals in the sociological literature (Barthes 1975; Bourdieu 1984; Charles & Kerr 1988; Adams 1994; Pederby 1995).

On the supposition that the social function of gendered food practices has been ascertained and that Barthes' and other's observations of gendered food practices are valid, this explanation nevertheless remains weak on several points. It provides no account of why particular foods are selected which then serve this social function. Nor does it explain the more puzzling fact that the same foods are selected in many otherwise disparate societies. Finally, it also exhibits the usual weaknesses of functionalist explanations. It does not provide any account of why particular practices and preferences are generated, how their meanings are constructed and why or how they may be subject to change. It merely accounts for a reason why given practices and preferences are maintained and reproduced. Why women or children should develop the particular food preferences they do remain puzzling facts for which no account is offered.

Charles and Kerr pursued the functionalist argument in their study of family food preferences and meals (1988). However, they also raised the question as to whether that argument should be turned upside down: if instead food products are rank ordered, it might be the case that population groups which have a higher social status and more power are in a position to consume the greater part of the best goods (Charles & Kerr 1988:80). As they saw the matter this was a question of the which-comes-first-kind (usually posed in regard to "the hen or the egg?"), now posed in regard to culture (the culinary status of foods) or social structure (the social status of family members). As such, they inclined to the view that the question could not be answered. However, disregarding the issue of attributing causal significance to one or the other of these factors, an empirical question remains: whether or not food products are rank ordered. If indeed they are, we would be in a position to explain why particular foods serve particular social functions. It has been documented with respect to one food culture that specific combinations of food do serve as symbolic markers of rank ordered meals, a fact that is noteworthy in this context (Douglas & Nicod 1974). Charles and Kerr's data also documented that both meat and alcohol are markers of higher ranking occasions such as Christmas or Sundays as compared to everyday occasions.

However, the idea that the same foods might serve the same social function in otherwise disparate cultures rests on the further premise that human beings in a fairly broad

range of different industrialized societies rank order some foods in a broadly similar fashion. This in turn would imply that these cultures are not quite so disparate on all points as we have been inclined to think. While this point is often raised in the context of discussing cultural consequences of globalization (*cf.* Castells 1999, 2000), the question is perfectly admissible quite apart from that context. We have long been familiar with the fact that the vast majority of extant societies rank order the relative social status of men and women in a broadly similar fashion. As applied to the culinary status of foods, however, the notion of a similar pattern of rank ordering in different societies challenges some premises of social and cultural theory with respect to food practices that are not usually questioned.

These premises are here taken to be: (1) that any given food culture is unique; (2) in the same manner as languages, food cultures differ to a greater or lesser extent from one region, one society and one population group to another; and (3) we can only hope to understand or explain food practices by placing them within their specific cultural context. Whether one or more of these premises should be revised, or the notion that foods may be rank ordered in a similar fashion in different societies should be withdrawn, was an issue we were unable to resolve at that point in time. The latter point, however, was an empirical issue that could be resolved by research. Meanwhile, the "transcultural" character of gendered food preferences remained a puzzling issue.[7]

The other main approach to the explanation of these issues in the literature regards the question of why particular foods are discerned as being 'masculine' or 'feminine', focussing on

[7] The term "transcultural" serves as convenient shorthand for the notion that foods may be rank ordered in a similar fashion in different societies. If this is the case, the societies at issue share a cultural similarity on this point, and the term might be considered something of a misnomer. Perhaps it should also be said that this notion does not amount to a claim that a 'universal' is at issue.

the issue of *how* such discernments are made. This issue concerns what is sometimes referred to as the 'cognitive underpinnings' of social practices. Two suggestions on this point have been proposed: association and metaphorical cognition, respectively. These suggestions are not mutually exclusive, and in some cases have been proposed in concert. Certainly it is clear that if we could account for how these discernments are made, we would be in a stronger position to account for the available data regarding gendered food preferences.

Lupton had explored the extent to which social actors could account for the character of their own discernments in a study undertaken by means of focus groups in Australia (Lupton 1996). It was found that while both men and women could readily agree upon which food products were discerned as being 'masculine' and which 'feminine', they were unable to agree on reasons why this was the case. In the event, Lupton resorted to the available suggestions regarding association and metaphor in seeking to account for the discernments made by her respondents.

The first of these suggestions is that points of similarity are discerned between the characteristics of a food group on the one hand and those of men or women on the other, yielding associations between them. For example, it has been suggested that the characteristic strength, aggression and virility of animals may be associated with characteristics of 'masculinity', and that the colourful, decorative and delicate characteristics of vegetables may be associated with characteristics of 'femininity' (*cf*. Fiddes 1991; Adams 1994; Fürst 1995). To these Lupton added the suggestion that sugar, milk and other dairy products may be perceived as having such qualities as sweetness, softness and whiteness, which in turn are associated with characteristics of femininity, as expressed in the characteristics of a bridal dress (1996).

None of these suggestions in the sociological or anthropological literature are grounded in an account of the cognitive operation at issue, nor have they been explored by means of experimental research methods. Most such explanations have been offered as *ad hoc* suggestions made in the context of discussing the analysis of relatively small sets of data collected from a local population or as reflections on the existing literature. One may feel convinced that a particular suggestion is a good one, or one may feel unconvinced, but one is not offered any basis on which the issue might be resolved. Much the same objections can be

raised with regard to suggestions regarding metaphorical cognition. For example, Lupton's findings with regard to meat and vegetables were interpreted with reference to metaphor, and formulated somewhat boldly in the following terms: "There is a symbiotic metaphorical relationship between femininity and vegetables: the eating of vegetables denotes femininity, while femininity denotes a preference for vegetables. A similar relationship exists for masculinity and meat eating." (1996: 107) In the absence of any account of the cognitive operations at issue in metaphor, it must remain doubtful whether assertions of this kind advance our understanding of the character of gendered food preferences.

Douglas had earlier suggested that metaphor is implicated in the distribution of food tastes and preferences, but noted that: "... the exact mechanisms of metaphor, comparison, and social grading of events and food which make for cultural competence have not yet been established." (Douglas 1984:9). Elsewhere, she presented her conviction that sociologists should give due credit to the character of metaphorical understanding: "this code-breaking, jigsaw-puzzle solving activity of the human mind" (Douglas & Isherwood, 1996 [1979]: viii). Fürst (1995) has also presented the view that metaphor is implicated in the relationship between gender and foods, but an account of the character of metaphorical cognition with respect to food habits is yet to appear in the sociological or anthropological literature.

On this basis, we proposed a different explanation in our review of the literature, pursuing the idea that the relative social status of men and women on the one hand and the relative culinary status of food products on the other, are each rank ordered.[8] The evidence for the latter was provided by some studies regarding the rank ordering of food categories and meal types in Western food cultures, the results of which confirmed that a similar pattern was at issue (Douglas & Nicod 1974; Twigg 1984; Rosenberg 1990). Seen in this light, it was suggested that a systematic pattern could be discerned whereby men's food preferences follow the tacit rule of choosing the foods and meal types to which relatively higher culinary status is accorded, while women's food preferences correspondingly follow the rule of choosing foods

[8] O'Doherty Jensen & Holm 1999:357; this volume: p. 84-85.

and meal types to which less culinary status is accorded, preferences in each case being discerned by both men and women as gender-appropriate. This approach to the task of explanation was compatible with the available empirical data and offered the further advantages of being potentially able to account for the manner in which gendered preferences are generated and constructed as well as reproduced. We presented it as a hypothesis. Its weak point lay in its assumption that social actors do discern and follow tacit rules. In common with our colleagues, we had no account to offer in regard to the question of *how* such discernments are made.

Perhaps the main reason for this lacuna in social theory is due to the status accorded to socialization theory (*cf.* Strauss & Quinn 1997). After all, the fact that social action is guided and regulated by tacit norms, which remain implicit and are only explicated by sociologists rather than by social actors, is a point that belongs to the introductory textbooks of our discipline. In this respect, gendered food practices and preferences do not constitute exceptions. The fact that social actors nevertheless reproduce any given set of implicit norms is in turn accounted for by reference to the theory of socialization, according to which the particular set of norms operative in any given society become internalised by the individual actor. However, this standard answer is challenged by the data regarding gendered food preferences. The standard answer does not cover the question as to why some informal norms with respect to gendered preferences for specific foods in a range of different societies should be similar.

1.2 *The Character of the Problem and the Search for Theory*

On this background, the central problem I set out to illuminate was: how do social actors discern particular foods as being gender-appropriate or otherwise? In more general terms the issue concerned how appropriate practices are discerned, given that their meanings are implicit. My assumption was that if this cognitive process could be successfully accounted for in a manner that was compatible with the available data, the remaining puzzles might fall into place. I therefore embarked on the task of trying to find a theory that could illuminate the cognitive underpinnings of gendered food practices, being aware that what I was looking for was an account of how tacit meanings are constructed and discerned, expressed and

understood in social action and interaction. That is to say, I was *not* looking for a theory of meaning constructions as explicitly expressed in language practices. Based on Lupton's findings and supported by a long tradition of research in this field, my supposition was that the meanings of gendered food practices are meanings that are acted upon and expressed in practice rather than in words for the reason that social actors are unable to express these meanings in words.

Since I had no reason to expect that such an account would be found within the bounds of my own discipline, I allowed myself to undertake a widespread and unspecific bibliographical search, broken by intervals of much eclectic reading. Apart from gender studies, this included some areas with which I was partly familiar beforehand: cognitive sociology with reference to motivation and shared meanings; social anthropology with regard to the phenomena of ritual and metaphor; social semiotics with regard to the social functions and uses of signs, and social psychology with reference to non-verbal communication and behaviour. Other readings led me far from my own field and included: cognitive psychology with reference to categorization, the phenomena of 'prototypes', association and analogical reasoning, as well as 'implicit', 'tacit' 'procedural', 'pre-conceptual', 'non-conceptual' or 'experiential' meanings; developmental psychology and neuropsychology with reference to non-verbal communication (between infants and care-givers), the phenomena of 'proto-linguistic' conversation and 'affect regulation', as well as clinical psychology with reference to non-verbal communication (between therapists and clients), the ontogenesis of symbolic thought and its relation to affect, the phenomena of 'linking' and metaphor in clinical settings, as well as the phenomena of 'acting out'. It also included further readings in metaphor theory as such, which to my consternation revealed itself as yet another burgeoning field of multi-disciplinary research that included more schools of thought than could be counted on the fingers of two hands.

It transpired that the theoretical approach that seemed to be both relevant to and promising for my purpose was 'conceptual metaphor theory', originally launched by Lakoff, a linguist, in cooperation with a philosopher (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). Some of my wider

reading did suggest other disciplinary approaches that would be relevant and brought me insights that also carried the promise of being able to illuminate one or the other aspect of the data regarding gendered food preferences. For these reasons it later helped to highlight some limitations of the selected theory (see Section 2). Indeed, I was surprised by my own choice of theoretical approach. I had been reluctant to venture into the field of linguistics for the reason that my central interest regarded the discernment of meanings that are not expressed by means of language. I had no reason to think that theoretical developments in this field would contribute to my task. The exercise of coming to grips with some of the perspectives of metaphor theory, however, had made it necessary to do so and also suggested that I was partly mistaken with regard to my assumptions about the character of cognitive linguistics, not least semantics as the specialisation concerned with theory of meaning.

Conceptual metaphor theory had been developed further in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, both as a cognitive theory of semantics (Lakoff 1987, 1993; Lakoff & Turner 1989) and as a contribution to philosophy (Lakoff & Johnson 1999). Apart from interesting applications in the analysis of literature (Turner 1987, 1991, 1996) and linguistics, it had also inspired some interesting anthropological work regarding the analysis of concepts and metaphor in everyday speech (Quinn 1987, 1991). Later this selection of a theoretical approach was expanded, in that the more recent development of 'blending theory' offered more promising perspectives with regard to my purpose. This theory had been launched in the mid-1990s by Turner, a specialist in cognitive rhetoric who had been a key figure in both developments, and the cognitive scientist Fauconnier, whose earlier work had made important contributions to cognitive linguistics (Fauconnier 1994 [1985], 1997; Turner & Fauconnier 1995; Turner 1996, 2001; Fauconnier & Turner 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002).

At this point in my search for theory, it had become clear to me that just as some social theorists are interested in the cognitive underpinnings of social practices, so some theorists in the fields of linguistics and literature are interested in the cognitive underpinnings of language practices. Furthermore, 'blending theory' was being applied to the analysis of film, music, the visual arts and visual images in advertising, suggesting that a cognitive theory developed in close association with specialisations of linguistics might nevertheless be

employed in the analysis of non-verbal data.

1.3 *The Way Forward (1): Applications of Cognitive Semantics*

On this basis, it seemed to me that my way forward lay in appropriating some of the perspectives of conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory, seeking to develop a conceptual framework that would serve to illuminate how appropriate practices are discerned, with particular reference to the manner in which men and women discern particular foods as being gender appropriate or otherwise. These theoretical perspectives are outlined in the following section of this paper.

2. Theory and Conceptual framework

> "To attempt to understand culture by ignoring the human mind is like attempting to understand *Hamlet* by ignoring the Prince of Denmark."
>
> Melford Spiro 1987[9]

In seeking to illuminate the discernment of social practices as being gender-appropriate or otherwise, I have come to focus upon the character of the cognitive operations that underlie uses of metaphor. It should be emphasised that while this topic has been the central concern among conceptual metaphor theorists, metaphor is viewed by blending theorists as being only one among many other kinds of meaning construction. Blending theory accounts for the cognitive operation of 'conceptual blending', thought to be always present in the construction and interpretation of metaphorical meanings, but also present in many other kinds of meaning construction that bear no relation to the phenomena of metaphor. In the following outline I focus on some few central points in both theories that are directly relevant to my topic. I introduce these points by outlining the more traditional account of metaphor that obtained earlier, and which is still defended or developed in one or another form among opponents of the cognitive approach. In order to avoid repetition, reference will be sometimes made to one of the papers that follow when a particular point is made or exemplified in those contexts.

2.1 *Metaphorical statements: the traditional account*

According to the traditional account, metaphor is a rhetorical device, a figure of speech, in which a word or phrase is accorded a meaning that deviates from conventional uses of language. Metaphor is characterised by talking about something in terms of something else, usually in the form of a claim to the effect that 'A is B'. Metaphorical statements regard comparisons that creatively identify a point of similarity between things or an analogy between relationships (Ricoeur 1986). Examples are: 'marriage is a jail' or 'coffee is the tea of

[9] As cited by Strauss & Quinn (1997:9) with reference to Spiro (1987): 'Collective representations and mental representations in religious symbol systems'. In: B Kilborne & L L Langness (eds.): *Culture and Human Nature: Theoretical Papers of Melford E. Spiro*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 161-184. [Orig. Publ. 1982]

Sweden'. Such statements are further characterised by the fact that when they are interpreted literally, which is to say according to conventional uses of language, they prove to be nonsensical statements, defying the rules of logic as well as the lexicon (Kittay, 1990). In this sense, the meanings of metaphorical statements are often unstable, and unlikely to become conventional lexical meanings. For example, we would not reasonably expect to find 'marriage' listed as a secondary or tertiary meaning of 'jail' in our dictionaries, nor the term 'coffee' used as a secondary meaning of 'tea'. The meanings of these statements are nevertheless readily understood in practice, in so far as the point of similarity (e.g. restricted freedom) or the analogy (e.g. the place of a non-alcoholic and hot beverage in two different food cultures) is understood. Psycho-linguistic experiments reveal that people usually do grasp the meanings of metaphorical statements as quickly, or virtually as quickly, as they do conventional statements (Gibbs 1999).

The 'topic' of a metaphorical statement is said to be indicated by the A term ('marriage' and 'coffee' respectively in the examples above), which is also designated the 'tenor' or 'target domain' of the statement. The B term ('jail' and 'tea' respectively) is designated the 'vehicle' or 'source domain', and its function is to attribute new meaning to the 'topic'. The use of metaphor often contributes a fresh understanding of any given topic, or offers a new perspective on that topic in a way that prompts or promotes further thought (Cox & Theilgaard 1997). Once stated, we can frequently employ a particular metaphor to think or talk further about the topic at issue (e.g. just how restricted married people can be, or how strange and yet familiar are the food habits of foreigners).

Not all metaphorical statements offer a fresh view of their topic, however. At one end of the scale are metaphors that are so commonly used as to have acquired stable meanings and become incorporated into conventional uses of language (e.g. 'that idea might be *fruitful'* or 'what *field* are you working in?'). At the other end of the scale are the peculiarly apt and evocative metaphors characteristic of poetic expression, often hailed as creative achievements. We might locate the more novel uses of metaphor in everyday speech at a mid-point on such a scale. In traditional metaphor theory as developed in relation to rhetoric and literary criticism, the more stable and conventional uses of metaphorical terms have been

variously termed 'dead', 'effaced', 'faded', 'frozen' or 'entrenched' metaphors and have been given relatively little attention. Very much more attention has been devoted to novel metaphors, not least the connotations evoked by the images employed in poetic uses of metaphor. The frequency with which novel metaphors occur in everyday contexts has been revealed by content analyses of recorded oral discourse. One of the lowest frequency counts cited by Gibbs in his review of this work was the occurrence of a novel metaphor every 2 to 3 minutes in the course of political debate (Gibbs 1999:123). From this perspective, we are dealing with a very common language practice in dealing with uses of metaphor.

2.1 *Conceptual Metaphor Theory*

Lakoff and Johnson launched a new theory of metaphor with the publication of *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) and, in effect, they also made a contribution to cognitive science. Their radically new claim was that metaphor is not primarily a feature of language, but first and foremost a feature of human cognition. Metaphor, it was claimed, is a way of constructing meanings, with reference to the formation and structure of conceptual categories. According to this view, metaphor is a pervasive feature of language for the reason that it is pervasive in thought and action, the conceptual system in term of which we think and act being very largely metaphorical in character. Language merely provides an important source of evidence for the operations of our conceptual system.

The point of departure for their analysis was to take conventional uses of language as their data. On the assumption that any natural language will comprise a vast array of entrenched metaphors, they set out to undertake a retrospective exploration of the pervasive influence of metaphor in the formation of everyday English language concepts. According to their analysis, when we entertain the idea that 'concept A' is similar to 'concept B' in one or more respects, this gives us a conceptual grip on the characteristics of concept A (the target). The function of the B concept (the source) is that of helping the process of conceptualisation. The B concept can perform this function if it happens to be more clearly delineated in our minds than the A concept, sometimes by reason of referring to familiar and recurring

experiences in everyday life.

Lakoff and Johnson provided a very wide range of examples of the cognitive process whereby the structure of a source concept is projected onto that of a target concept, helping thereby to highlight and clarify some aspects of that target concept, while tending to hide or ignore other aspects. For example, some aspects of 'marriage' are highlighted by the metaphor 'marriage is a jail', quite different aspects would be highlighted by a metaphor such as 'marriage is a work of art'. In both cases, the conceptual structure that is recruited from the source to the target domain is partial and carries with it particular inferences suggested by the conceptual structure of that source domain.

Their radically new contribution was to identify a very broad range of metaphors that we do not typically formulate in words as such, but which nevertheless structure our manner of thinking and talking in everyday life. These were termed 'conceptual metaphors'. For example, we do not formulate the conceptual metaphor: 'ideas are foods'. What we in fact do is to conceptualise and talk about 'ideas' in ways that are structured by this metaphor. We talk for instance about *planting the seeds* of an idea, *devouring* new ideas or finding them *hard to swallow;* we have *raw* facts, *half baked* ideas and come across ones that are difficult to *digest* (*cf.* Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 46-47). The term 'conceptual metaphor' was coined to refer to the kind of metaphor that underlies these uses of language and which rest upon the creative cognitive operation in which something is conceptualised in terms of something else.

Conceptual metaphors that are entrenched in conventional language are analysed as stable and systematic relationships between two mental representations or 'conceptual domains', a source and target domain respectively. 'Projection', 'mapping', 'conceptual structure', and 'image structure' or 'image schemas' are among the key terms of these analyses. The meanings of these terms are indicated briefly here and illustrated with respect to an example that is introduced in one of the following papers[10] (see Fig. 2).

[10] O'Doherty Jensen 2002b.

	SOURCE DOMAIN	TARGET DOMAIN
Conceptual structures:	>FOOD=	>IDEAS=
Elements of conceptual structure:	**(B)**	**(A)**
	Counterpoint connections:	
	Soil - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Mind
	Seeds - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Feelings, images, words, vague thoughts
	Plants - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Ideas
	Roots - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Earlier ideas, presuppositions, convictions
	Stems, branches - - - - - - - - - -	Functional relations between ideas
	Animal parts - - - - - - - - - - - -	Structural relations between ideas
	Fields - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	>Bounded= areas of ideation
	Growth - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Development and dissemination of ideas
	Tending, weeding - - - - - - - - -	Clarification of ideas and arguments
	Flowers/fruit - - - - - - - - - - - -	Results and effects of ideas
	Harvesting - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Results and rewards of ideas
	Slaughtering - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Dealing with/rejecting arguments
	Buying, selling - - - - - - - - - - -	Accepting others= ideas, convincing others
	Cooking - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Thinking and assembling ideas
	Serving - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Communicating ideas
	Eating - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	Internalising ideas, rescinding statements
	Disposing of waste matter - - - -	Rejecting worthless ideas

Fig.2: The mapping of counterpoint connections between (A) elements employed in the conceptualisation of 'ideas' and (B) the conceptual structure of 'food' [11]

Projection refers to the cognitive process whereby language structure, conceptual structure and image structure from a source domain are used to describe, delineate or depict a target concept. Projection also includes the process whereby inferences that apply in a source domain are applied to a target domain. For example, to '*hand out* ideas *on a plate'* or '*spoon feed* students' are descriptions of the process of communicating ideas that carry inferences from their source domain, in which the recipient of a (food) service is accorded passive or babyish roles, respectively. Mapping refers to the process whereby counterpoint connections (variously termed: cross-domain correspondences, links, etc.) are identified between the elements of conceptual or image structure in a source and target domain, the number and kind of elements depending upon the structure of the source domain. Mapping is said to be systematic in so far as counterpoint connections between the elements of each conceptual

[11] This presentation of counterpoint connections is inspired by examples drawn from a number of sources, which are indicated in the text, as well as by personal observations regarding language use.

domain do in fact line up with each other in a non-arbitrary and non-random manner as revealed by language practices. It is said to be stable in so far as these practices belong to conventional uses of the language at issue. In identifying 'ideas are food' as a conceptual metaphor therefore, the suggestion is that our concepts of 'food' serve as a source domain for some of the ways in which we conventionally conceptualise, speak and write about 'ideas'.

As a source domain, 'food' has a relatively complex conceptual structure comprising many elements including object categories (meat, vegetables) and their corresponding superordinate (animals, plants) and subordinate categories (beef and pork, beans and peas). It also includes categories of events and processes (growth, development, change) as well as categories referring to a series of activities (producing, distributing, buying/selling, preparing, serving, consuming, eliminating and disposing), which are interrelated in a temporal sequence. It would seem that experiences and concepts within this source domain do help us to conceptualise the character of ideation, thought and argument, to express what we want to say about the character of 'ideas' and to understand what others say about this topic. The ways in which we commonly do talk about 'ideas' reveal that our conceptualisation is in fact structured by everyday knowledge recruited from the source domain of food. Some examples of this referred to by Lakoff and Johnson (*raw* facts and *half-baked* ideas) have already been mentioned. Several more examples drawn from everyday uses of language are offered in one of the following papers[12], and many more can be gleaned from Deignan's collection of metaphors drawn from the corpus of actual language usage registered in the Bank of English (*cf*. Deignan, 1995).

According to the traditional theory of metaphor, examples of these uses of language would be seen as instances of 'dead' metaphors and as being unrelated to each other. According to conceptual metaphor theory, they are indeed examples of entrenched metaphorical usage, but they are related to each other in so far as they are structured in a systematic manner by a single conceptual metaphor that constrains our uses of language. Furthermore, in so far as these language practices continue to be used and to make sense in

[12] O'Doherty Jensen 2002b

practice, the cognitive operations of projection and mapping that serve to reproduce them must be said to be very much alive. From this point of view, the term 'dead' is inapplicable, 'entrenched' being the term preferred by conceptual metaphor theorists.

Lakoff and Johnson argued that our conceptual system is grounded in experience and that no metaphor can be represented or comprehended independently of its experiential basis (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The experiential bases of many of the conceptual metaphors identified by them are accounted for in terms of the motor or perceptual images that underlie them. For example 'more is up' is identified as a pervasive conceptual metaphor widely employed in structuring many conceptual domains, whereby the spatial orientation of 'verticality' serves as a source domain for the conceptualisation of 'quantity'. (For example: people with relatively more income are said to have *higher* social status, while those with less income have *lower* status.) Johnson developed the insight that the embodied experiences of human beings are structured in the form of images or 'image schemas' prior to and independently of any concepts (Johnson, 1987).

Later, the point was further developed that imagery plays an integral part in all conceptual metaphors. That is to say, when conceptual structure and language are projected and mapped from one domain to another, images are also projected and mapped on to each other (Turner, 1991, 1996). This insight served to make it clear that the source domain employed in any process of conceptualisation is not selected on an arbitrary basis. Not just any domain can usefully serve as the ground of conceptualisation and metaphorical formulation. Turner had earlier identified the fact that counterpoint connections between conceptual structures are established between elements that exhibit a similar 'event shape' as pictured (Turner, 1987, Lakoff & Turner, 1989). This can be illustrated with respect to 'ideas are foods' by considering some similarities between the imagery of scenarios in both domains. For example, plants and animals emerge more or less suddenly into the light of day having undergone a long process of growth that is not visible and is probably somewhat more obscure to our understanding than the event of their appearance as such. It would seem that this imagery does help us to conceptualise our experience of an idea *arising* in our minds or

that of *getting* an idea. (And indeed not only do ideas *crop up*, we also *give birth* to them.) In the same way, the pace at which food products grow and develop, the care we give them in this process and the many social contexts in which we deal with food products, yields us a series of images that seem to be useful for conceptualising the character of a quite different set of experiences that nevertheless exhibit similar imagery.

The constraints imposed by image-structure on the selection of and projection from source domains were identified as constituting a 'principle of invariance'[13], in turn identified as the factor underlying the discernment of metaphorical formulations as being more or less apt. For example, being made to '*eat* one's own words' is commonly discerned as being an apt metaphor. The image of a social situation in which food prepared by a cook for the consumption of others is handed back untouched aptly applies to a scenario in which a speaker is forced to *take back* a statement made earlier. To '*eat* one's own verbs' is a statement in which language and conceptual structure are also recruited from the same source domain, but the statement does not suggest images in each domain that are counterparts of each other, and for this reason is not discerned as being metaphorical, much less as being an apt metaphor. To put the matter differently, it is for precisely this reason that some kinds of nonsense fail to "make sense", while uses of metaphor apparently do make sense to most people.

In the final chapter of their book (1980), Lakoff and Johnson offered a series of hints regarding possible applications of their approach to research in other fields. Their reflections on this point included some ideas about the significance of ritualised actions in everyday life. The suggestion was made that ritual practices that are performed regularly - such as making the morning coffee or enjoying an annual Thanksgiving dinner may constitute "metaphorical kinds of activities..." (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 233-235).

Quinn has applied the insights of conceptual metaphor theory to the tasks of social

[13] Originally identified by Brugman (1990), the principle was defined by Turner (1996) as a global constraint upon metaphorical cognition and expression to the effect that image-schematic structure in the source domain shall not result in an image-schematic clash in the target.

research in an analysis of metaphors employed in everyday life to describe the character of 'marriage'. The qualitative data employed in her analysis were the verbal reports given by informants in the course of personal interviews (Quinn 1987, 1991). This focus upon verbal data is perfectly legitimate, but it does not pursue the suggestion that conceptual metaphor theory might also be applicable to the analysis of nonverbal data and is therefore of limited relevance in the present context.

2.3 *Blending theory*

Since blending theory includes an account of the cognitive operations that yield metaphorical meanings, it was initially greeted in some circles as a competitor to conceptual metaphor theory. This view is no longer held, the account of metaphor in terms of 'blending' being seen as similar in many respects to that of conceptual metaphor theory, as differing on some key points, and as providing a framework that facilitates more detailed and differentiated analysis of the construction of metaphorical meanings (*cf.* Grady, Oakley & Coulsen 1999). The cognitive operation termed 'conceptual blending' is the pivotal one in this theory, and it is conceived as being a creative and ubiquitous operation that underlies all cultural achievements (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Metaphor in this context is merely one kind of meaning construction among others. Some of the broader perspectives of blending theory, its background and an example of a metaphor analysed within the framework of blending theory, are presented in one of the following papers.[14] While the outline given here will be as brief as possible, some repetition in regard to characterising the framework itself cannot be avoided.

Blending theorists, just like conceptual metaphor theorists, understand metaphor as being primarily conceptual and secondarily a matter of language. However, blending theory more explicitly allows for the fact that metaphor may be expressed by means of other expressive media of communication than language - sign language, visual images, gesture and ritual having been topics of recent analyses (Liddel 1998; Sweetzer 2000; Sørensen 2000; Turner 2001). The projection of language, concepts, images, experiences and inferences from

[14] O'Doherty Jensen 2002b.

one conceptual domain to another are also integral aspects of the blending framework, just as constraints on the process of projection itself are also elements of both theories.

One of the key differences is that while conceptual metaphor theory focuses upon the analysis of metaphors that are entrenched in conventional uses of language, blending theory focusses on the analysis of on-going constructions of meaning. Blending theory aims to account for the cognitive operations of creative thought processes in greater detail and with more precision than had been accomplished earlier. For this reason, the initial examples of metaphors analysed within this framework were novel metaphors, data being drawn from such sources as an article, cartoon or advertisement in a daily newspaper or a magazine. The difference with regard to the use of preferred data is less apparent to-day, since a number of blending theorists have now applied this newer and more elaborate framework to the analysis of entrenched conceptual metaphors (examples are found in: Hougaard & Lund (eds.) 2002, Vol. I, II & III).

A more important key difference between these theories regards their frameworks of analysis. Conceptual metaphor theory lies closer to more traditional accounts of metaphor in that it regards the relationship between two conceptual domains (two 'terms', A and B, in traditional accounts) and conceives projection and mapping as a uni-directional process - that is to say, the path of projection and mapping being from a source to a target domain. (The latter account replaced what was termed 'asymetric topicality' in more traditional accounts, according to which the A term only was the topic of a metaphor. To claim that 'B is A' –'jail is a marriage', for example - would have a meaning that differed from the meaning of the claim that 'A is B'.) Blending theory introduced the idea of four 'mental spaces', as compared to two 'conceptual domains', being employed in any on-going process of meaning construction, and allowed for the possibility of bi-directional mappings and projections between all four spaces. The 'mental space' concept is an analytical tool inherited from Fauconnier's earlier work (1994 [1985], 1997), in which any particular thought or image at issue in an on-going process of meaning construction is said to occupy a 'mental space' (or simply a 'space' for short). These four spaces are said to operate within a 'conceptual integration network'[15].

[15] A figure illustrating the relationships between these mental spaces within a conceptual integration network is reproduced from Fauconnier & Turner (2002:45-50) in: O'Doherty Jensen 2002b, p. 142. An example referring to a particular meaning construction is given in the same paper; this volume: pp. 142-145.

Two of the mental spaces within such a network are termed 'input' spaces, and have a function that approximates that of the two 'conceptual domains' referred to in conceptual metaphor theory. The mapping between counterpart elements in each of these input spaces is referred to as 'cross-space mapping'. Blending theory also allows for the possibility that several more input spaces than the minimum of two may be involved in any given process of meaning construction. The remaining two mental spaces within a conceptual network are termed respectively the 'generic' and 'blended' mental spaces. The generic mental space contains conceptual or image structure that is common to the input spaces and to the blended space. The blended mental space is one in which some elements from the input spaces are combined and often further developed, the contents of this mental space being referred to as a 'blend'. A blend is said to have 'emergent structure' for the reason that its contents are not found in either input space.[16] Blending theory thus contributes to metaphor theory by providing an account of the character of conceptual blending as a cognitive process taking place within a 'conceptual integration network' comprising four mental spaces. In order to underline the fact that blending theory is not primarily a theory of metaphor, a single example of a non-metaphorical blend is offered here. This is an instance of what is termed 'category metamorphosis', brought about by the introduction of a relatively new concept to the discourse of everyday life. The following example of the concept of 'same-sex marriage' is borrowed from Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 269-271). It serves to illustrate the manner in which a blend is understood by a listener as well as the manner in which it may be constructed by a speaker.

Although the phrase 'same-sex marriage' may not yet be a fully conventional phrase in English, its syntactic form - a noun from one input space and a modifier from a different input

[16] 'Emergent structure' is said to be generated by one or more of the following three processes: (1) *composition* of projections arising from one or more inputs; (2) *completion* based on independently recruited frames or scenarios, or (3) *elaboration*, arising in the process of "running the blend". *Cf.* Fauconnier & Turner, 2002.

space - carries a signal to the person who hears it that it will probably "make sense" by combining some elements from two inputs. The 'marriage' input may include such elements as a man and woman, procreation, love, sex, a shared household, a wedding ceremony, a religious sacrament, a legal status, a publicly displayed relationship, financial advantages, etc. The 'same sex' input suggests a different domestic scenario, and may include such elements as a same-sex couple, love, sex, absence of biologically common children, a shared household, a concealed relationship, etc. The discernment of counterpart connections between the elements in these inputs is straightforward, several being identical. These are projected to the blended space, while the process of projection also selectively recruits some additional structure from each input. The elements of a wedding ceremony and social recognition might be recruited from the 'marriage' input, while same sex partnership and absence of biologically common children are recruited from the other input. The structure of a new concept, referring in this instance to the properties of a new social institution, then emerges in the blended space, changing thereby the meaning of the category 'marriage'. The new category would then have new criterial attributes, it no longer being a defining characteristic of 'marriage' that it concerns a heterosexual union devoted to progeneration. While this example as such is banal, Fauconnier and Turner claim and seek to demonstrate that precisely similar cognitive operations within a conceptual integration network are involved in the emergence of other "new" concepts, such as that of 'complex numbers' in the history of mathematics (2002: 270-274).

The operation of conceptual blending is thus characterised by the combination of elements from two input spaces or more, and by the emergent structure that arises within the blended space. The theory specifies the mechanisms by which emergent structure is developed as well as the constraints upon this process. It allows for the possibility that inferences are not only projected between inputs and from inputs to the blend, but also for the possibility that inferences are projected back to input spaces from the blended space. (The latter is exemplified above as the process in which the category 'marriage' is itself changed by the emergence of a new category.) Finally, it distinguishes kinds of networks and blends according to typical patterns of projection within the network: simplex, mirror, single-scope,

double-scope and multi-scope blends (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). In single-scope networks, only one of two inputs provide the organizing structure adopted in the blended space - conventional source-target metaphors being the prototype of this network. While the old issue of asymmetric topicality is what is at issue here, it would not be fair to say that blending theory has only contributed new terminology rather than new insight on this point. The blending framework does make it possible to reconstruct the emergence of intricate and creative thought processes in a manner that has not otherwise been possible hitherto. Although this can hardly be convincingly presented in a brief outline, I have tried to do so in one of the papers that follow.[17]

2.4 *Some Limitations of this Theory*

Lakoff and Johnson, followed by Fauconnier and Turner, shifted the focus of metaphor theory away from the idea that metaphor is a matter of talking about something in terms of something else, and towards the idea that it concerns conceptualising something in terms of something else. Metaphor theory was thereby no longer considered to be a theory of language, but rather a theory of human cognition. As yet, however, both frameworks retain much of the focus and perspectives of their disciplinary origins. This is revealed in two ways: in the selection of relevant data and in the limited extent to which these accounts of cognition are informed by empirical research and theoretical developments in closely related fields.

Blending theorists, as compared to conceptual metaphor theorists, have selected a wider range of data and have given some attention to other expressive media than that of language. Examples of the latter are as yet few and far between, however, compared to the very large number of analyses of linguistic data undertaken by linguists within the blending framework (*cf*. contributions to Hougaard & Lund (eds.) 2002). Blending theorists have virtually ignored the findings of empirical psychology. Lakoff's subsequent development of cognitive semantics on the other hand had drawn upon empirical research undertaken by Rosch and other psychologists in his account of the character of categorization and prototypes

[17] O'Doherty Jensen 2002b.

(1987). Theorists in both schools of thought are highly aware that in dealing with concepts they are dealing with phenomena that are also cultural phenomena, but nevertheless have drawn minimally on cultural and social theory or research.[18] It is quite immaterial in the present context whether these remarks are taken as criticism of blending theorists or as an invitation to psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists and others to join the programme of blending research. Either way, the limitations of this body of theory as currently developed present a number of difficulties when the attempt is made to analyse social practices that are not language practices within this framework.

A first difficulty is presented by the use of the terms 'conceptual' and 'conceptualisation' as blanket terms for thought in general and all cognitive processes, probably influenced by the fact that these accounts of cognition have been largely developed from data regarding uses of language. In effect, this has meant that cognitive operations have been identified in a "backward" movement that proceeds from the individual speaker's use of language to concepts and concept formation, then to images, and finally to (visual and motor) percepts and experiences. This might equally well be described as a 'top-down' account of cognitive operations, proceeding from verbal expressions of conceptualised meanings to the cognitive underpinnings of these meanings. It has yielded a relatively undifferentiated account of cognitive operations, and one that does not immediately facilitate the analysis of non-verbal, and perhaps non-conceptualised, social practices. The operation of 'blending' is also termed 'conceptual blending', while the contents of any given blend are described in

[18] The notion of 'framing' as applied to the use of concepts is partly inspired by the work of Gofman (1986), and the concept of 'material anchors' is adopted from the work of Hutchins (1995, 2002), a cognitive anthropologist. It should be noted that Turner has sought to elucidate the contribution of blending theory to the social sciences (Turner, 2001). This initiative may indeed initiate some dialogue. Apart from its initial chapter offering a re-interpretation of Geertz's data with reference to the Balinese cockfight, however, it remains very much a blending theorist's conception of points that social scientists should find relevant to their enterprise.

terms of 'conceptual structure'. When asked, not infrequently it seems, whether blends occur at the level of percepts, such that one could also speak of 'perceptual blending', the answer given by Turner was: "We just don't know yet how far down blending goes."[19]

In contrast, the cognitive theory offered by developmental psychologists might be described as accounting for ontogenetic development from a 'bottom-up' perspective. That is to say, from the relatively inchoate experiences of the new born as a starting point to the relatively sophisticated cognitive contents and operations of the young child or adult. From this perspective, very much that is accomplished by the cared for infant cannot be described as being conceptual in character, although these accomplishments do underlie later processes of concept formation and language use. These cognitive accomplishments include the early recognition of pattern and imitation of facial gesture, now known to occur in a particular interpersonal context within minutes of birth (Kugiumutzakis 1998), the matching and organization of perceptual experiences arising from different sense modalities as well as affective and kinaesthetic experiences arising in the infant's own body (Stern 1985; Schore 1994), the recognition of intention in others and the accomplishment of joint attention to objects (Trevarthen 1997, 1998), the early formation of nonverbal symbols regarding the uses of material objects in interpersonal contexts (Winnicott 1982; Trevarthen 1997), and the early uses of words and their attendant concepts, the meanings of which can remain wholly embedded in the interpersonal and situational contexts of their usage (Donaldson 1978, 1993).

If some of these perspectives were to be incorporated into blending theory, we might expect them to yield a more differentiated account of the cognitive underpinnings of social practices, including language practices, in a manner that was more adequately grounded in a wider range of empirical data. We might expect, for example, that conceptual and pre-conceptual or non-conceptual cognitive operations would be distinguished. Given the focus of developmental psychologists on the interpersonal contexts in which all human cognitive abilities develop, we might also expect an approach of this kind to facilitate insight into the intrinsically intersubjective, social and cultural character of cognitive contents. The contribution of culture to the content of operative categories is a weak point of cognitive theory as currently developed, and unsurprisingly is also the point noted and criticised by

[19] This was the answer given by Mark Turner in response to this question, posed at: *International Symposium on Art and Cognition*, Centre for Semiotics, Århus University, Jan. 25-27th, 2001.

anthropologists (Quinn 1991; Douglas 1992) The incorporation of these perspectives would in turn facilitate the analysis of social practices, the meanings of which are not conceptually available to social actors.

A second and concomitant difficulty regards the meanings of the terms 'action' and 'interaction', as employed in analyses undertaken within these frameworks. The point is frequently made that both metaphor and non-metaphorical blends are pervasive features of human action, but it transpires that 'actions' tend to be conceived as activities that are mediated by language and/or conceptual thought involving the use of relatively clear ('higher' level) concepts. For example, the study of gesture has focussed upon the use of blends in the sophisticated form of sign language employed by deaf people (Liddel 1998). The uses of material objects in processes of communication have also been studied within the blending framework, and it has been suggested that objects function as 'material anchors' for blends (Hutchins 1995, 2002; Fauconnier & Turner 2002). However, unlike the 'transitional' objects, such as the baby's blanket or teddy bear studied by psychologists, or the 'symbolic' objects such as social uses of food or other goods studied by sociologists and anthropologists, the material objects at issue in blending analyses tend to be technological innovations, such as the navigation instruments studied by Hutchins. The production of such objects also rests upon relatively sophisticated 'higher' level concepts rendering it relatively easier, I would suggest, to identify *conceptual* blending in their production and use. Much the same can be said in regard to analyses of film or song that focus upon textual narrative or the use of visual images in advertising as means of communicating a clear 'message'. There are exceptions to this tendency with regard to the analysis of both ritual and music (Sweetser 2000; Sørensen 2000; Holst 2002). These analyses break new ground, so to speak. They tend to be characterised either by the attempt to develop a more differentiated terminology or by applying the terminology of the blending framework to data (such as musical notes) that are not first and foremost conceptual in character, while remaining uncritical of the terminology as such.

A kernel point in social and cultural theories of practice concerns the need to understand and to account for the 'routinized' practices of everyday life, as distinct from the more 'reflexive' practices that rest upon conceptual meanings that can be readily verbalized (Giddens 1979, 1991; Bauman 1998). In modern societies, a range of routinized practices rest on what has been called 'how to' knowledge with respect to modern technology: how to travel by aeroplane, tell the time, download music, etc. They also include a vast range of 'how to' routines with respect to activities that in principle might be, and in fact are, accomplished in a range of very different ways: how to do the shopping, cook, eat, make love, bring up children, cope with illness, furnish a room, clean a home, dress, relax, work, pray, chat, enjoy oneself, etc. While habitual activities of this kind are commonly experienced as being meaningful to a greater or lesser extent, the meaning of doing things one way rather than another may not be conceptually available to social actors. Nevertheless, these differences do matter. It is activities of this kind that sociologists tend to identify as those that are governed by informal norms in ways that differ from one society to another and one social group to another, and which anthropologists identify as aspects of 'culture'. And it is the same range of activities that have posed the greater challenge to the development of a theory of practice (*cf.* Turner S 1994). Such practices have been variously characterised as resting upon 'collective representations', as 'traditional actions' and 'folkways' in the older literature of cultural and social theory. More recent work has developed such terms as 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1977, 1984), 'ways of operating' (Certeau, Giard & Mayol 1998), and 'implicit schemas' and 'interpretive schemas' (Strauss & Quinn 1997), recognising that differences between the practices of one social group and another are also markers of style, the meanings of which remain implicit.

Strauss and Quinn have argued the view that any theory of shared cultural meanings, particularly with reference to implicit meanings and internalisation, must be based on some knowledge of how the "*intra*personal" (psychological) realm works as well as knowledge of the "*extra*personal" (social) realm (1997:8-10). Psychologists, however, as indicated above, seem to increasingly agree on one point: all cognitive accomplishment and regulation of affect

that is achieved by human beings is initially generated in *inter*personal contexts (Stern 1985; Schore 1994; Trevarten 1997; Bråten (ed.) 1998; Hobson 2002). On this background, it would seem to be clear that an elucidation of the tacit meanings of social practices (whether gendered or otherwise) rests on a number of issues that are as yet unresolved in cultural and social theory, and that blending theory as currently developed cannot contribute to their resolution. It is my personal conviction that theoretical development in cultural and social theory as well as blending theory would benefit greatly from interdisciplinary work undertaken in cooperation with developmental psychologists.

A third difficulty, and the final one to be mentioned here, concerns the neglect of affect within the frameworks of conceptual metaphor and blending theory. This is a serious omission with regard to a theory of human cognition, given the findings of neuropsychology, developmental and clinical psychology that cognitive and affective processes are closely interrelated (Schore 1994; Damasio 1996; Hobson 2002). It is also a serious omission with specific regard to metaphor theory. The affect laden character of verbally expressed metaphor, when used in clinical settings has been amply documented by Cox and Theilgaard (1997[1987]), while the use of non-verbal metaphor as a substitute for conceptual thought and verbal expression has been also observed in clinical settings (Ogden 2002). Once again, this is not an issue on which conceptual metaphor or blending theory can contribute to the development of a cultural and social theory of practice at the present time. The need for some account of the role of affect, feelings, emotions or motivational force is widely acknowledged in cultural and social theories of practice. The fact that a variety of emotions and feelings are also at issue in the food practices of everyday life has been documented by a long tradition of research in this field (Murcott 1983, 1993; Charles & Kerr 1986, 1988; DeVault 1991; Holm & Kildevang 1996; Warde 1997). However, the emotional underpinnings of cognitive, linguistic or other social practices are no more than sporadically mentioned in the work of conceptual metaphor and blending theorists.[20] This point has recently been taken up with specific regard to the interpretation of metaphor within the blending framework, such that we might now expect a further development of theory in this field (Brandt & Brandt, forthcoming).

[20] Metaphorical descriptions of emotion have been analysed, not emotion as such.

2.5 *The Way Forward (2): Development of a conceptual framework*

It seemed to me that if a theory of metaphor was to be applied to the analysis of nonverbal social practices, the meanings of which remain implicit, the focus would have to be shifted once again. At issue are tacit or implicit meanings that are not commonly put into words by social actors, either directly (as identified by traditional metaphor theorists) or indirectly (as identified by conceptual metaphor theorists and blending theorists). The fact that social actors have difficulty in putting these meanings into words (as identified for example by Lupton 1996) strongly suggests that the meanings at issue are not conceptually available. It would seem that implicit meanings are nevertheless presented in kinds of practice. In so far as metaphor is operative in such practices, its function can hardly be said to be that of mediating conceptualisation as such. It could, however, be that of presenting meanings that (frequently, at least) are not conceptualised or are poorly conceptualised. On this basis, some terms were developed with a view to facilitating the analysis I wished to undertake. These are as follows.

Performative metaphor:

Metaphor as expressed non-verbally in the social practices of everyday life can be defined as concerning the matter of treating something (or someone) in terms of something (or someone) else. The terms 'metaphor' (as applied to talking about something) or 'conceptual metaphor' (as applied to conceptualising something) in that case might be supplemented by such a term as 'performative metaphor'[21]. This term and its usage corresponds to that employed by some clinical psychologists in their observations of metaphorical phenomena in clinical settings, as

[21] The terms 'performance' and 'performative' as used here do not refer to speech acts or to the meanings of particular kinds of speech acts. The usage does not therefore correspond to that familiar to students of linguistics or linguistic philosophy, in which a 'performative' refers to a kind of utterance. Rather, it refers to a long tradition of usage by sociologists, anthropologists and psychologists, as the succeeding text seeks to make clear. In this tradition, 'performance' or 'practice' refers to social activities carried out by social actors, disregarding whether speech is employed. In the event that speech is employed, there may very well be discrepancy between the (semantic) meaning of *what is said* and the (performative) meaning of *what is done* . ("She's been claiming for years that their relationship is finished, but in fact they've gone on living together....").

well as to the usage of some anthropologists with reference to ritualised actions. Ogden, for example, refers to a "metaphorical act" (2002) and Kirmayer to "enactive metaphors" (1992), both with reference to idiosyncratic meanings as presented in gestures. Shore's analysis of cultural differences between regions of Polynesia identifies metaphor in ritualised posture, apart from language use (1991), while Turner identifies metaphor in ritual uses of material objects (Turner V 1974). Lakoff and Johnson as well as Douglas, as mentioned earlier, have suggested that metaphor is implicated in everyday uses of consumer goods, while Fauconnier and Turner have noted the role of objects as material anchors for blends. On this background, the term 'performative metaphor' is suggested as one that could be employed to refer to all practices in which something or someone is treated in terms of something or someone else, whether the activity is an instance of idiosyncratic behaviour, habitual action in response to normative expectations or a ritualised form of practice. In this manner some of the insights of conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory might be made applicable to the analysis of gendered food preferences.

'Appropriate' or 'proper' social practices: cognitive underpinnings

One of the achievements of conceptual metaphor theory was to identify the role of imagery in the discernment of verbal expressions of conceptual metaphor as being more or less 'apt'. If metaphor is expressed performatively in non-verbal social practices, it might also be the case that such practices are discerned in a similar manner as being more or less 'appropriate' or 'proper'. While 'aptness' refers to the appraisal of selected words, turns of phrase or longer tracts of discourse as employed in a given pragmatic context, the terms 'appropriate' and 'proper' or their equivalents are commonly used with reference to the appraisal of social practices in a specific social context. These include the social uses of consumer goods as well as other matters of social etiquette. Ways of doing things are discerned as being more or less suitable or fitting, and sometimes as simply being the "correct" form (*cf.* Morgan, 1996). Social research has documented much diversity with regard to the discernment of foods

deemed suitable for human consumption, as well as eating habits that are deemed to be appropriate to given social contexts (Marshall & Bell 2002). Several studies have also documented discernments of particular meals as being the 'proper' kind. On this basis, I formulated the following working hypothesis: if performative metaphor can be identified as operative in non-verbal practices, its function will be that of mediating discernments of practice as being more or less 'appropriate' or as being 'proper'.

This approach in turn suggested to me the need to re-conceptualise the cognitive underpinnings of social norms, according to which the individual social actor is conceived as a locus of internalised social norms, the socialized and culturally competent actor being one who has learned the rules and conventions and is able to apply the relevant rule in a given situation. That understanding of social practices has been trenchantly criticized by Joas, who has argued the need for a social and cultural theory that recognizes the creativity of social action and has suggested some of the elements of a theory that would go "beyond functionalism" (Joas 1996). Not indeed that this point in regard to the creativity of the actor has not been made earlier (for example: Cicourel 1973), and many theorists to-day would conceive themselves as proceeding on constructionist rather than voluntarist premises. But a functionalist approach to the analysis of social action is a heritage that still tends to inform analyses of everyday life with reference to food practices. A concern to conceptualise the social actor in creative rather than passive terms is also a central concern expressed by the authors of each of the theories of social practice mentioned earlier (Bourdieu 1984; Certeau, Giard & Mayoll 1998; Strauss & Quinn 1997). It seemed to me that Lakoff and Johnson, followed by Fauconnier and Turner had something important to offer on this point.

Certainly Lakoff and Johnson's analysis of the use of entrenched metaphors in conventional language attributes more cognitive creativity to the individual speaker than that attributed by functionalism to the individual actor, who is conceived as acting voluntarily in accordance with social conventions. According to the account of conceptual metaphor theory, the speaker has not merely learned the usage of an entrenched turn of phrase, but continues to use it as a turn of phrase precisely in so far as it continues to "make sense". And the speaker to

whom the notion, for example, of '*sowing the seeds* of an idea' does make sense, is one who is able to discern counterpoint connections between words, concepts, images and experiences that occur in two different contexts/domains. Although the speaker has learned a conventional phrase, the mechanism of its reproduction rests upon the creative ability to discern counterpoint connections. Blending theory takes this analysis a step further by accounting for the manner in which the discernment of counterpoint connections can yield 'emergent meaning' as expressed in the use of novel metaphor.

If these perspectives were to be applied to the analysis of gendered food preferences, we might expect to be able to identify the same cognitive operations of projection and mapping, such that counterpoint connections between categories of food and categories of people are discerned in a manner that "makes sense" to social actors. As a further working hypothesis, I therefore entertained the view that these operations in turn would comprise the cognitive underpinnings of social norms as expressed in conventional practices.

'Categorial' and 'gradient' mappings:

On this basis I resolved to explore the extent to which conceptual metaphor and blending theory might contribute to the task of accounting for the character of food practices in everyday life. At an early point in these endeavours, it seemed to me that the framework of conceptual metaphor theory could be applied to the analysis of food taboos in a manner that was straightforward. For example, Douglas' structural analyses of food taboos among the Lele and dietary rules among the ancient Israelites had demonstrated that their food practices were based upon a correspondence between animal categories and social categories. In the language of conceptual metaphor theory, as adapted to my purpose, taboo could be accounted for as performative metaphor: one set of categories (kinds of people) being treated in terms of another set (kinds of animals), animal categories having been mapped onto social categories. It did not seem to me, however, that uni-directionality applied in this case, a point that blending theory helped to resolve. It did seem highly likely that quite similar cognitive

operations would underlie discernments of any given social practice as being the 'proper' kind. This was the line of thought that originally led me to assess conceptual metaphor theory as "promising" with regard to my own narrow purpose, not least because discernments of meals as being 'proper' or otherwise was a central theme of research in my own field.

However, this approach did not seem helpful with regard to understanding gendered food preferences in industrialized societies. In the light of the available social research on this topic Lotte Holm and I had offered an explanation that accounted for these data. That explanation had been formulated in hypothetical terms for the reason that we could not offer any account for the systematic patterns we observed from the perspective of the actor. The same weakness might indeed be levelled at Douglas' form of structural explanation with regard to taboo. But in that case, I was beginning to see that conceptual metaphor theory could probably yield an account of taboo from the actor's perspective, and also that Douglas had been right in her claim that metaphor was implicated in consumption practices. The same could not be said with regard to our own data. It did not seem that the mapping of categories from one domain to another was at issue in regard to discernments of food practices as being appropriate to a greater or lesser extent. Rather, it seemed to be the rank ordering or grading of categories (kinds of foods, beverages and people) and the discernment of more and less culinary and social status that was at issue in these food practices.

It was for this reason that I began exploring blending theory, hoping that a more elaborate framework would yield some answers. I also began to examine Lakoff's later work on categorization with particular regard to the phenomena of gradience, gradient categories, prototypes and prototype effects (Lakoff 1987). Quite apart from the character of the data regarding gendered food preferences, I had another reason to suspect that discernments of gradience might also be at issue in performative metaphor. My wider reading had informed me that human beings discern relationships between gradient phenomena virtually from birth, and as from 3 weeks of age with approximately the same level of accuracy as adults. The experimental work in this area has been summarized by Stern (1985). The ability to discern relationships between conceptual categories on the other hand is, ontologically speaking, a

much later development. This in turn suggested to me that gradient phenomena might play a part in the less conceptualised practices of everyday life. This part of my search ended when I proposed a distinction between 'categorial' and 'gradient' mappings as underlying different kinds of blends (see Section 3).[22]

This account of my way forward has been written in a chronological rather than systematic form for the reason that my work has proceeded by trying to solve problems one at a time. This will be clear from the presentation of papers in the following section.

[22] O'Doherty Jensen K 2002a.

3. Applications and Development

"Why do they have to put so many raisins in müsli? Do they think it's only for kids, or what?"
Young man (anonymous) 1999[23]

The first of the four papers which follow having already been presented (Section 1), the remaining three papers are presented in this section. Each of them attempts to apply the theoretical perspectives outlined in the previous section to the analysis of food practices, and their contents can be characterised as follows:

- The second of the following four papers reports the results of an empirical study in which data were collected from Danish men by means of focus groups. This work yielded me an opportunity to explore some aspects of food categorization with particular reference to gradience.[24]
  The paper is addressed to a readership comprising nutritionists and epidemiologists, who are specialists in the use and evaluation of food frequency measures and are assumed to be unfamiliar with the theory or methods of sociology or cognitive science.

- The third paper presents an analysis of existing empirical data with regard to gendered food preferences and consumption practices in industrialized societies.
  In this paper I launch the concept of 'performative metaphor', and develop those of 'gradient mapping' and 'gradient blend', suggesting the need to expand the blending framework as currently developed with a view to rendering it applicable to the analysis of non-verbal social practices and to discernments of 'appropriate' practice.
  This paper is addressed to a readership of blending theorists, most of whom are

[23] Exerpt from the transcript of focus group interviews conducted by Jytte Halkjær, Department of Human Nutrition, Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, 1999 (trans.: KO'DJ).

[24] Data collection was undertaken by research student Jytte Halkjær, Department of Human Nutrition, Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, 1999.

specialists in cognitive linguistics and are unfamiliar with the theory and methods of sociology or anthropology.

- The fourth and final paper also presents an analysis of existing empirical data. It examines the results of three empirical investigations of what has been termed the 'proper dinner', as a feature of British food culture and everyday domestic life.
  The objective of this paper is to distinguish and apply the concepts of 'categorial' and 'gradient mapping' in a manner that demonstrates some aspects of the contribution that blending theory can make to the analysis of meaning constructions underlying cultural conventions.
  The paper is addressed to a readership comprising sociologists and anthropologists, who are interested in food studies and are assumed to be unfamiliar with conceptual metaphor theory or blending theory.

It will be apparent that this work suffers some of the difficulties of seeking to cross disciplinary boundaries. However, it is not the purpose of the following outline to present considerations in this regard, nor to focus upon empirical results as such. Some implications of this approach for empirical research with regard to food practices are taken up in the following and final section of this paper (Section 4). My limited purpose here is to clarify the relationship between these papers as applications of conceptual metaphor and blending theory to cultural and social data and the attempt made to develop that theory in a manner that would render it applicable to such data.

3.1 *Gradient Categories: Food Products*

The purpose of this study[25] was to explore patterns of cognitive difficulty in responding to food frequency questionnaires, using Lakoff's (1987) account of categorization with particular

[25] The study is entitled: Food Categorization: A Key to Understanding Cognitive Difficulties in Responding to Food Frequency Questions.

reference to the phenomena of gradience. A food frequency questionnaire poses questions of the kind: "How often do you eat potatoes?" The respondent is asked to indicate the number of times per month, week or day he or she usually eats that item. Given the cooperation of willing respondents, the success of the method is clearly dependent on whether or not the questionnaire designer and the respondents categorize foods in similar ways. We were interested in two kinds of difficulty in this regard as seen from the respondents' point of view: (1) difficulty in understanding or misunderstanding of the questions posed, possibly due to disparity between expert (nutritionist) and lay categorizations of foods, and (2) difficulty in estimating an accurate answer, possibly due to the irregularity with which that item is eaten. The first kind of difficulty we termed 'category problems'. We hoped to identify pattern in regard to the respondents' category difficulties by exploring the extent to which gradient phenomena were at issue in ways of thinking and talking about food products. We also aimed to identify disparities between the questionnaire designer's and respondents' categorizations of food, and to be able to formulate guidelines for improving food frequency questionnaires. The latter aspects are not focussed upon here.

Lakoff had analysed categories as ranged on two gradient continua, one vertical and one horizontal. The vertical dimension regards a taxonomy of categories that are related to each other by reason of increasing levels of class inclusion and abstraction, such that more general and 'superordinate' categories occupy one end of a continuum, while more specific and 'subordinate' categories occupy the other. 'Root vegetables', 'potatoes', 'golden wonders' exemplify such a continuum, the category located at its mid-point being termed a category on the 'basic' level[26]. The horizontal dimension of gradience on the other hand, refers to the internal structure of a given category at a given level of abstraction. Such a category is said to have gradient structure if some category members are discerned as being better or worse exemplars of that category than are other members. Potato plants growing in a field, cooked

[26] It is found that categories which occupy the 'basic' level are those which are learned first by children and belong to the more frequently used and familiar words in any given language.

potatoes on a dinner plate, a carton of french fries, a dish of potato salad, exemplify subordinate kinds of the category 'potatoes'. If it is the case that one or more category members (or subordinate categories) are discerned as being the best or most representative member of that category, they are said to constitute the prototype of that category or to be among the prototypical members of that category.

Experimental research in cognitive psychology, using such methods as direct ratings, reaction times, drawing of examples, similarity ratings, etc., have shown that people frequently distinguish categories on the basis of prototypes and discern different category members as being more and less representative (Lakoff 1987; Reber 1993; Gibbs 1999). Prototypes or prototypical members are those that are quickly and easily recalled, selected or identified, while less representative exemplars evade recall, remain unselected or their identification as category members requires longer time, as measured in seconds or microseconds. For example, it has been found that robins are judged to be more representative of the category 'bird' than are ostriches. People will agree, if asked, that an ostrich is indeed a bird. But not being a prototypical category member, it is rarely among the first kinds of bird that are spontaneously recalled. So far as we could ascertain, no studies of consumer categorizations of food with reference to this dimension of gradience had yet been undertaken.

It should be emphasised that the question as to whether a particular category belongs to a superordinate, basic or subordinate level, and whether or not any given category member is prototypical or otherwise, are empirical issues. Given our method of data collection, the analysis was intended to be explorative, employing Lakoff's distinctions as a conceptual framework so far as our data permitted. The analysis was undertaken independently by two researchers on the basis of a full transcript of audio-recorded data from two focus group sessions. Somewhat surprisingly, this analysis indicated clear patterns with regard to the character of cognitive difficulty when respondents treated a particular food group as belonging to a superordinate or to a subordinate category, which they did in 5 of the 10 food groups examined. It also transpired that prototypes were at issue in 7 of these 10 food groups and in all 5 of the instances in which food groups were treated as superordinate or subordinate categories. On this basis it was possible to pinpoint the areas of disparity between the

Respondents' categorizations and those intended by the designer of the questionnaire[27], such that specific guidelines for improving the questionnaire could be formulated.

This study contributed to my ongoing work project in two ways, the overall contribution being documentation of the fact that gradient phenomena play an important role in consumer conceptions of food. Firstly, with regard to the horizontal dimension, it had become clear that prototypes do play a central role in consumer categorization of food. The data indicated that prototypical variants of a food group tend be fresh rather than processed products (giving rise to a tendency to overlook the latter in patterns of recall). During the group discussions, comments from some participants had served to remind other participants of kinds of products that had not been taken into account: that potato crisps, for example, are 'potatoes' or that tinned tuna is also a kind of 'fish'. But the discussion had also made it clear that such products tended to be regarded as poor exemplars of their kind, being conceived as "not really potatoes" or not "real fish", respectively. Prototypes, I concluded, were to be taken into account with respect to discernments of 'proper' foods, meals or kinds of food practice.

Secondly, with regard to the vertical dimension of gradience, it also seemed to be clear that food categories are indeed ranged on a continuum according to degrees of abstraction, and also that operative categories were heavily dependent on common and familiar meal habits. But a taxonomic perspective focussing on relative degrees of abstraction as a criterion of rank ordering was too narrowly conceived in my view. The data regarding gendered food preferences (*cf.* Section 1) had suggested that different kinds of food might also be ranged on such a continuum and ranked relative to each other. In practice, any criterion, not merely degrees of relative abstraction, could serve this function. For example, the criterion of price serves to rank order the variants of any given food product conceived as ranging on a scale from 'very cheap' to 'very expensive'. One of the tasks undertaken in this study had also revealed that health was a criterion by which different kinds of foods could be and were rank ordered on a scale running from products that are 'bad for you' to those that are 'good for

[27] These meanings were ascertained by means of personal interview.

you'. If gradient or 'scalar' perspectives are at issue in consumer conceptions of food, as indicated by the results of this study, then cognitive operations of mapping, as they take place in practice with respect to consumer goods, may also have a scalar form. That is to say, goods as ranged on one gradient scale may be mapped onto another gradient scale. While this would seem to be clearly the case with regard to assessments and comparisons of product prices, the operation of comparing gradients may have much wider significance. On this basis, I resolved to explore the cognitive implications of the idea that grades of food are discerned as being appropriate to grades of events or grades of people. This was the issue taken up in the following paper.

3.2 *Gradient Mapping*: *Gendered Food Practices*

The objective of this paper was to develop a cognitive account of the process whereby gradient mappings yield appraisals of non-discursive social practices as being more or less 'appropriate' or 'inappropriate'[28]. A distinction between 'continuous' (or gradient) variables and 'discontinuous' (or categorial) variables is a familiar feature of quantitative research methods in a number of fields, including that of sociological research. What is new about the proposal put forward in this paper is the idea that this distinction, whereby varience is conceived in 'more or less' as well as 'either/or' terms, is also operative in the cognitive activities of everyday life, and that discernments of the former kind - that is, of gradience - are integral features of non-discursive social practices.

Images of spatial continua underlie verbal appraisals of 'inappropriate' actions as "going too far", being "wide of the mark", "over the top", or indeed of "not going far enough", "stopping short", etc. They also underlie appraisals of 'appropriate' actions and 'proper' options as being "spot on", "hitting the nail on the head" or as being quite simply "fitting". Language practices thus support the claim that discernments of gradient continua

[28] This paper is entitled: 'Gradient Blends: The Art of Discerning and Doing the Appropriate Thing'. It was presented at: *The Way We Think: A Research Symposium on Conceptual Integration and the Nature and Origin of Cognitively Modern Human Beings*, held at: University of Southern Denmark, Odense, 19-23rd August 2002.

are at issue in appraisals of social practices.

The contribution of this paper to cognitive theory, as developed within the framework of blending theory, was to introduce the idea of an integration network in which cross-space mapping between inputs regards the alignment of entities as distributed on two gradient continua. The generic space in all such networks is conceived as having a constant structure, in which grades correspond to each other, while the blended space is such that the relative position of an entity (or entities) on one continuum is discerned as an analogue of the relative position of an entity (or entities) on another continuum with which it is compared.

This conception contrasts with the account of 'conceptual blending' on several points. It suggests that the inputs to a gradient network may or may not have conceptual structure, while blending theory posits that inputs always have conceptual structure.[29] It suggests that cross-space mapping within a gradient network regards the alignment of relations between grades, which are discerned as analogous to each other, and not the alignment of elements of conceptual structure, which are discerned as corresponding to each other by reason of one or another of a variety of possible relations including identity, similarity, analogy or other grounds. It suggests that the contents of a gradient blended space always regard gradient features of presented data discerned as an analogue of gradient features of something (or someone) else with which it is compared, and may or may not have conceptual structure. This contrasts with the view that blends always recruit and combine elements of conceptual structure from input spaces.

The attempt was also made to account for the fact that, in practice, it may be very difficult to conceptualise and verbalise meanings that are discerned within a gradient network. The most obvious reason for this may be that the meaning at issue is not conceptual in character. However, it would also seem to be the case even when one or more of the inputs to

[29] Examples of gradient inputs are: the width of a smile, the duration of a hug, the size of a floral bouquet, the speed of movement, the spaciousness of an office, the beat of a piece of music, the complexity, duration, number of participants or number of courses in a meal. A diagram illustrating the structure of a gradient blend is presented in O'Doherty Jensen 2002a: 251; this volume: p. 127.

such a blend do have conceptual structure: for example, when the relative importance of an occasion is aligned with the relative formality of dress, manners and menu. The discernment of an event as having a grade of 'importance' does have some conceptual structure in so far as the event is discerned as belonging somewhere on a continuum that runs, let us say, from 'very unimportant' to 'very important'. It is suggested that the main reasons why gradient meanings present difficulty with regard to conceptualisation and verbalization are due to: (1) the non-discursive character of cross-space mapping in a gradient network, and (2) the non-discursive character of the medium of communication. In the example above, it is uses of material goods that function as the medium whereby gradient meanings are communicated. That is to say, the medium of communication, which functions in an analogical manner, is also non-discursive. On the other hand, it does not belong to this line of argument to suggest that gradient discernments of this kind are never expressed by means of language. We might well imagine scenarios in which suggestions are made to "dress down" with a view to visiting the Jones' or to "tone down" the menu on inviting them home. What people may find more difficult nevertheless would be the task of putting into words just precisely what it is that characterises the solution deemed appropriate in each case. It has frequently been observed that people find it easier to describe the options which they rule totally out of account.

This conceptual framework was employed to account for the discernment of foods as being gender-appropriate, given the available data regarding (a) the relative social status of men and women, (b) the relative culinary status of foods, as expressed by their role in menus, and (c) patterns of gendered food preferences in industrialized societies. That account will not be repeated here. Some implications of this framework of more general significance for sociological analysis of food practices will be taken up in Section 4.

3.3 *Categorial and gradient mapping: The 'Proper Dinner'*

The fourth paper which follows was designed to apply the framework of 'conceptual' blending, supplemented by that of 'gradient' blending, to the analysis of a well

documented set of food practices.[30] I conceived this exercise as a "test" that would enable me to draw conclusions regarding the fruitfulness of this approach to the analysis of implicit meanings as expressed in social practices and cultural conventions. Given my area of research, it was clear that a food product, food practices or a consumption ritual with reference to food should constitute the data. Given limited resources of time and money, it was also clear that I could not undertake an empirical study based on my own collection of data, but would have to select existing data.

There were three main reasons for selecting the British 'proper dinner'. Firstly, this meal is an exceptionally well documented consumption ritual, having been investigated in a series of seminal studies that are familiar to sociologists and anthropologists of food, and which tend to be regarded as 'classical' contributions to this field. Secondly, the character of the data suggested that they could be re-analysed from the dual perspective of 'conceptual' and 'gradient' blends. These data indicated that British housewives not only discerned but also talked about this meal as being the 'proper' kind. There was therefore good reason to assume that some aspects of these practices were conceptualised and that a prototype was at issue. At the same time, the meal incorporates both meat and vegetables, which were and are discerned as 'masculine' and 'feminine' foods, respectively - this being a pattern I had sought to explain as the product of a 'gradient' blend. Lotte Holm and I had earlier been struck by the fact that a meal incorporating precisely these two food categories was traditionally conceived as the norm among heterosexual couples, the 'masculine' element being accorded a central role and the 'feminine' a supplementary role[31]. Also this pattern might now be accounted for as the product of a blend whereby 'appropriate' options are discerned (although happily there are circles in which this particular blend would be less salient to-day). Thirdly, I felt personally convinced that the account of gradient mapping, gradient blends, analogical communication

[30] This paper is entitled: 'Accounting for the Implicit Meaning of a Cultural Convention: The 'Proper Dinner' Revisited from the Vantage Point of Blending Theory'.
This paper was presented at the international conference *Nature, Culture and Musical Meaning*, Network for Inter-disciplinary Studies of Music and Meaning, University of Southern Denmark, Odense, Aug. 25-28th, 2002.

[31] O'Doherty Jensen K and Holm L (1998), pp. 116-119.

and performative metaphor in my earlier paper, had yielded some aspects of the conceptual framework Douglas had been looking for when she noted, as mentioned earlier, that the mechanisms of metaphor, comparison, and social grading of events and food had not yet been established. Since Douglas was one of the three sets of investigators to have documented the character of the 'proper dinner' and to have interpreted its meaning, the prospect of re-analysing these data within a framework that distinguished conceptual and gradient blending provided a challenge that was especially interesting.

My paper presents and distinguishes these aspects of blending, here termed 'categorial' and 'gradient', respectively. It then presents the data, methods and conclusions of three investigations of the 'proper dinner', followed by a re-analysis of these data within the conceptual framework of blending theory. The objective of the latter was to explicate the construction of implicit meaning underlying this conventional meal.

The terms 'categorial' and 'gradient' blends were selected partly for the reason that they indicate a distinction that is familiar, often with reference to methodology, in many fields, and partly because a distinction between 'conceptual' and 'gradient', as such, is inapplicable. Many gradient blends, such as those accomplished by dancing to music or discerning a degree of anger as presented by visual, aural and kinesthetic data, may indeed be non-conceptual in character. But many gradient blends with reference to food practices do have conceptual structure,[32] the defining characteristic of a gradient blend being the character of the mapping operation. I would suspect that blending theorists in the field of cognitive linguistics may not be happy with this choice of terms. However, in the context of meaning construction with reference to metaphor there are excellent reasons for conceiving the function of metaphor as that of mediating the formation and clarification of categories.[33]

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[32] O'Doherty Jensen K, 2002a, pp. 249-250; this volume: pp. 125-126.
To complicate matters further, it is also true that much conceptual thought, as documented by Lakoff (1987) has gradient structure (*cf.* this Section of the present paper, pp.). I have yet to write a paper of appropriate length in which some of the differences between discursive and non-discursive cultural data can be explicated more fully and more satisfactorily with reference to meaning construction.

[33] C*f.* Section 2 of this paper

The analysis may be too complex to be dealt with within the confines of the article format. More precisely, the meaning constructions identified by this analysis are complex. However, my conclusion is that the perspectives of conceptual and gradient blending theory do have an important contribution to make to social and cultural analysis, not least with reference explicating the implicit meaning of food practices. One of the fruits of this particular analysis was to explicate the relationship between 'cuisine' and 'kinship' underlying this cultural convention. While Douglas had accomplished this in her earlier work, and had maintained the conviction that an account of 'symbolic structure' must be able to explicate its relationship to social structure, she had not been able to account for such relationships with reference to the food practices of modern industrialized societies. The reason for this, I would now claim, is that the cognitive underpinnings of these practices are gradient as well as categorial in character. Once that distinction is admitted, however, it becomes possible to account for conventional food practices in a modern society. Unlike the phenomena of taboo, these practices rest upon more than an ability to map one set of categories onto another.

3.4 *The Way Forward (3): Development of Sociological Theory*

This work has given me new insight into the character of food practices and of food culture (cuisine). As I now understand the matter, food practices are very largely concerned with the expression, communication and understanding of gradient meanings, in which kinds of food products, dishes, courses and meals serve as the medium of communication. A cuisine on the other hand is a cultural and social product in which sufficient stability, coherence and recurrence with respect to the categorization and grading of foods has been achieved and is maintained by any given group of human beings as to enable them to meet their biological needs for sustenance in ways that are experienced as meaningful. These perspectives suggest the need to develop theory and research with respect to the sociology of food in such a way as to advance our current understanding of the role and significance of gradient meanings as expressed in food practices, the medium by which they are communicated, and the processes that exert influence upon the relative stability and coherence, reproduction or change, of a

given cuisine. Some few aspects of this view are briefly considered in the following section.

4. Implications of the Theory

> "Cognitive scientists ... have pointed out the *first-order isomorphism fallacy* (FOIF), which consists in attributing to an organism internal structures analogous to the external structures of its outputs. ... For instance, termites build architecturally complex arches and pillars; the FOIF would consist in endowing the termites with some "mental program" for building arches and pillars. But in fact the termites "obey" a very simple rule in depositing glutinous sand flavoured with pheromone: they follow a path of increasing pheromone density and deposit when the density gradient inverts. The fact that this behaviour leads to the formation of arches and pillars is part of physics, not a property of termites."
>
> Gilles Fauconnier 1994: 168

Some few considerations arising from this work and regarding theory and research with reference the sociology of food are offered in this section. The findings of social research are sometimes employed to supplement those of dietary and nutritional research in the task of providing information to social actors, with a view to changing their dietary habits. In fact, it was a query from the national Food Agency with reference to this task that originally set this work in motion. For these reasons, some considerations with regard to dietary recommendations are also offered.

4.1 *Theory and research: Food Culture and Food Practices*

This work took its starting point in the findings of social and dietary research with regard to similarities in the patterns of food preference and consumption among men as compared with women in a variety of industrialized societies. A disparity was noted between these patterns and the premises shared by many sociologists and anthropologists with regard to the diversity of human cultures. It was also noted that the standard answer of socialization theory whereby the individual social actor is conceived as a locus of internalised norms could not account for the fact that the same food products appear to function as markers of gender in a number of different societies and that informal norms with respect to their meaning also appear to be similar. The need to account for the construction of implicit meanings, whereby practices are discerned as being gender-appropriate or otherwise, was seen in this light.

Having now made some headway with respect to that project, and having concluded that food practices are largely concerned with the expression, communication and understanding of implicit gradient meanings, its starting point might be considered irrelevant. But I would like to clarify my current standpoint by returning briefly to those issues.

I have no argument with the view that social researchers can only hope to understand or explain food practices by placing them within their specific cultural context. Usually, however, there are limits to just how specific we wish to be. For example, we would probably for the most part incline to ignore more or less minute differences between the 'proper' dinner as served in one family and compared with that of another, not having any reason to suppose that such differences are relevant or explicable with reference to a cultural or social context. However, differences of this kind are gradient differences. They are also the kind that are usually referred to in consumption theory as differences of 'style' (Bourdieu 1984; Douglas 1996, Certeau, Giard & Mayol 1998). Pursuing the conceptual framework developed in the course of this work, some considerations can be offered on this point. Whether or not gradient meanings underlie the practices at issue depends upon whether a difference in doing something one way rather than another is discerned by social actors. And whether or not such practices constitute performative metaphor with reference to gradient blending depends on whether their meaning is constituted by mapping such gradient differences to grades of difference on some other continuum with which they are compared. In that case, differences that express themselves as differences of 'style' are not arbitrarily generated. Nor perhaps are they exclusively 'cultural'. The examples of such blending which are analysed in the following papers[34] identify elements of social structure as constituting one of the inputs to such blends. We might well expect therefore that systematic variations of 'style' could be accounted for by analyses undertaken within this conceptual framework.

Nor do I have an argument with the view that any given food culture is unique. As just noted, we may want to pursue the search for unique or distinguishing features to the level of

[34] O'Doherty Jensen 2002a, 2002b

the individual, the household, generation or other social groups or categories. But once again there will be limits, and with regard to any larger units of analysis we are presumably going to be interested in similarities. Why the latter search should frequently halt at the level of a given 'culture' or 'society' is sometimes attributed to the heritage of anthropology. An opposed and recent view suggests on the other hand that contemporary societies are constituted by transnational networks such that sociological research should ignore national boundaries in selecting units of analysis (Castells 1999, 2000). The appropriate unit of analysis, I would suggest, depends upon the problem for investigation and questions regarding similarity and difference are empirical issues. However, the search for similarities at the cross-cultural or transnational levels is neglected by sociologists of food, as I have discovered in the course of this work. This is also among the issues to which we should give more attention.

There are, however, two points on which I cannot agree with the premises of sociological theory and research, as outlined earlier. More precisely, I want to take issue with specific tendencies that may very well be minority views. These are: (1) the tendency to raise the fact of cultural diversity to the level of a principle, and (2) the view that language should serve as a model for the analysis of non-discursive cultural practices.

The tendency to uphold cultural diversity as a principle would seem to be philosophically rather than empirically based. It is encountered in the context of arguing against the evils of essentialism, and is related to a conception of human agency which seeks to deny the idea of universals with respect to human beings. This is a view that is highly compatible with the theory of socialization noted earlier, which would assign all cognitive contents to culture, or to discourse, assigning learning ability to the individual social actor. To assuage any doubt on this point, it should therefore be said that blending theory, in common with a range of other cognitive theories, does posit universals. More precisely, it posits 'universals' with respect to cognitively modern human beings. Which is to say, blending theorists recognize that the cognitive operations of human beings more than 50,000 years ago were presumably different. The 'universals' at issue are, however, cognitive *operations*, not

cognitive *contents*. It is proposed that human beings are characterised by the ability to store experiences, entertain images and thoughts, discern counterpoint connections, blend cognitive contents and use language, most of which are creative abilities. Although the diversity of cognitive contents and cultural products is very great, the theory as such gives no grounds for raising those facts to the level of principle.

While I have criticized the limitations of blending theory as currently developed on several points, I share that conception of universals with regard to cognitive operations and their creative character. Blending theory as applied to social practices also contributes to the understanding of human agency by suggesting that the cognitive operations which underlie the production and reproduction of complex economic, normative and symbolic systems are relatively simple cognitive operations. They do not in any respect serve the function of building internal replicas of cultural and social products (*cf.* the quotation from Fauconnier, which heads this section).

The empirical evidence with regard to categorization indicates that categories on the 'basic' level do correlate very closely with each other, as between the different known languages and as between common sense and scientific descriptions of objects, but they do not correlate well at 'superordinate' or 'subordinate' levels. The implication would seem to be that if we should visit a society in which potatoes and meat are part of the local diet, we shall probably be able to learn names for those objects in the local language and that the usage of these new terms will correspond closely to our own familiar terms. Although the use of gradient categories (with reference to prototypes) is well explored, cognitive research has not focussed attention on the extent to which the grading of categories tends to be undertaken in similar ways. Empirical research with reference to food indicates that animal products are ranked higher than vegetable products, and that within the latter category cereal products are distinguished from other vegetable products and ranked lower. I have used these findings to argue the case that graded food categories and graded social categories, are mapped onto each other in the cultures of industrialized societies. There may very well be exceptions to this pattern, but they are not as yet documented. The paucity of data on this point is one of the reasons why I would like to suggest that theory and research in field of consumption should

devote very much more attention to the grading and rank ordering of products.

I do not share the view that language and language practices provide a model for the analysis of cuisine and consumption practices. More precisely, I would suggest that language provides a model for understanding those practices in which the uses of consumer goods closely resemble the uses of language, that is, with respect to categorization, conceptual meanings, 'categorial' mapping and blends. I would suggest however, that we should adopt other models than that of language with regard to the analysis of gradience, gradient meaning and gradient blends.

Without categorization we would fail to distinguish the many kinds of products, dishes, snacks, courses and meals that constitute our cuisine, whether we in fact do so discursively or non-discursively. Nor could we achieve categorial blends in which kinds of food designate other meanings. "Roast beef means Sunday, and Sunday means roast beef", as Douglas pointed out with regard to British food culture , and turkey means Thanksgiving, as Lakoff pointed out with reference to citizens of USA. We might vastly expand this list of products (christening, birthday and wedding cake, etc.) and expand the range of designated meanings beyond social occasion (to social class, gender, etc.). We are left, however, with the idea that cuisine is infinitely inferior to language as a medium of communication. This is a view I cannot accept, and it is also the reason why I do not accept that language provides us with a model for the analysis of cuisine.

I would suggest that sociology should adopt other models than that of language as a way of advancing our understanding of consumption practices as expressions of gradient meanings and of cuisine as an analogical medium of communication that enables us to do so. Gradient meanings regard *how* and *how much* meaning is at issue, as compared to categorial meanings, which regard *what* is meant. We distinguish sausages from roast beef and breakfast from dinner by means of categorization. But if foods have gradient meanings, then sausages for breakfast, may mean something quite different than sausages for lunch or sausages for dinner, and those meanings do not arise from 'symbolic' functions of sausages as such. Rather they depend upon just where exactly sausages belong on a culinary scale of food products and where the respective events belong on a culinary scale of meals.

The human body, music or other non-discursive cultural constructs that also function as analogical media of communication might serve us better as models for developing our understanding of the character of gradient meanings. The human body does not function as a symbolic medium in the manner of language with regard to the expression and communication of a given grade of affect. We discern just *how* angry a person is by discerning a range of gradient characteristics with regard to tone and volume of voice, tension of muscles, facial colour and expression, speed of movement, etc. When these correspond to each other, we can feel reasonably confident that we discern a given level of anger. Language does name some of the intervals on this scale (such as 'slight irritation' or 'raging mad'), and for this reason 'anger' is identified as a gradient category. But the body as a medium of communication can express an infinite variety of nuances on this scale. My thesis is that gradient differences between products, dishes, meals, and these items as graded relative to each other can and do function in much the same manner as a medium of communication. For this reason I suggest that other models than that of language would better enable us to appreciate the character of gradient meanings.

One of the advantages of the conceptual framework developed in the course of this work is that the concepts of gradient meanings and gradient blends open the possibility of undertaking analyses of consumption practices on the 'micro' level at which we might take account of such aspects as grades of affect or gradient differences of taste as inputs to gradient blends. However, as a programme for future research, I would prefer to propose that we might focus upon a 'macro' level of analysis. We might explore the idea of cuisine as being a relatively stable and coherent cultural construct, which is constituted by mapping the gradient or 'scalar' characteristics of foods, occasions, activities and people on to each other. In the papers that follow I present some examples of performative metaphor with reference to gradient blends that may serve to illustrate these perspectives.

4.2 *Practical Issues: Changing Dietary Practices*

With regard to dietary recommendations, there are three observations I would like to make in the light of these considerations. The first observation regards the grading of foods. In the

light of the available findings of social research, current recommendations seek to invert the culinary scale according to which consumers grade cereal, vegetable and animal foods. We are recommended to eat more cereals, more vegetables and less animal fat. In effect, this would require that we should ignore the gradient meanings of food as currently institutionalised in our cuisine. The second observation regards gradient blending with reference to gendered food practices. In the light of the analysis in the following papers, and given the bi-directionality of gradient mapping, it follows that an effective way to change the character of gendered food practices would be to change the character of gendered statuses. The third observation regards the importance of food as a medium for expressing gradient meanings. If this remains unappreciated by those who wish to change our dietary habits, it would seem that their efforts to provide information will for the most part be doomed to failure.

4.3 *Conclusions: The Way Forward (4)*

This work has pointed me in new directions. I have begun the work of developing a conceptual framework regarding the cognitive operations at issue in the construction of implicit meanings, but several issues remain to be solved (*cf.* Section 2.4). The framework as thus far developed has been applied to the analysis of empirical data regarding patterns of food practice (in two of the following papers), such that the implicit meanings of these practices are explicated. In my view, these analyses contribute respectively to the interpretation and explanation of gendered patterns of food preference and consumption in industrialized societies, and to the interpretation of the implicit meaning construction that underlies a widespread culinary convention. In so far as this is the case, these analyses serve to indicate that this conceptual framework can be fruitfully employed with regard to the analysis of food practices. In the course of this work, I have become aware that the analysis of gradient phenomena within my own research area is neglected, and have tried to indicate some of the issues to which priority might be given (Section 4.1). The identification of convergence between the conceptual framework developed on the basis of contributions to cognitive semantics, and the concerns of consumption theory and sociological theories of

practice with the concept of 'style', give some grounds for optimism and also indicate the direction of new tasks with regard to both theory and research in the area of food culture and food practices.

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The Contribution of Cognitive Semantics to the Development of Sociological Theory of Food Culture and Food Practices

PART II
Articles

Review

Preferences, Quantities and Concerns: Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Gendered Consumption of Foods[1]

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Abstract:

A review of the sociological research regarding the gendered features of food consumption is presented. The focus is upon differences between women and men in regard to their preferences for particular foods and types of meals, seen in relation to the cultural function of foods as symbolic markers of femininity or masculinity, assessments of the quantities of food consumed by women and men respectively, and differences between women and men in regard to concerns with food safety, health, weight reduction and fitness. Some methodological limitations of this research are discussed with particular reference to the need for interdisciplinary cooperation between sociologists and nutritionists in the design and analysis of dietary surveys. Suggestions are made in regard to future directions for sociological research in this field, with particular reference to the issue that dietary recommendations appear to focus upon increasing the consumption of foods that are markers of *femininity* and decreasing the consumption of foods that are markers of *masculinity* in Western food culture.

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Descriptors: food culture; eating habits; gender; sex differences; symbolic markers

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Introduction

Some significant differences between the eating habits of men and women are documented by dietary surveys. In seeking to improve nutritional status, it is essential to understand why such differences occur. On this background a review of research regarding social and cultural aspects of gendered food habits (O'Doherty Jensen & Holm, 1998) was undertaken in 1996-1997 at the request of The National Food Agency, Denmark. Selected findings from this review are presented here regarding food consumption in industrialised countries, followed by a discussion of some of the methodological limitations of this body of research and some of the substantive issues which are raised by it. It is suggested that a coherent pattern can be discerned in regard to gendered food habits when the research results under review are seen in the light of structural characteristics of Western food cultures, and that this pattern should be explored further since it appears to have significant implications for nation-wide programmes of nutrition education.

Materials and methods

The bibliographical search upon which the review was based was limited to social scientific literature registered in seven databases at specialised research libraries in the greater Copenhagen area, Denmark. These included databases regarding food habits and food culture, gender studies, consumer behaviour, as well as CD-rom databases *Social Sciences Citation Index* (1996) and *Sociofile* (1974-1996). Search was made in respect of specified sub-topics and embraced literature published in Danish, English, French, German, Norwegian or Swedish languages. Informed by a limited selection of keywords, the search yielded approximately 2500 source references of which some 600 publications were deemed potentially relevant and were requisitioned for further perusal. Approximately half of these were subsequently subjected to review by the present authors, both of whom are sociologists.

In the selection of relevant results, emphasis was placed on the methodological quality of the individual research project and on the extent to which its results are confirmed by other studies. These results are presented topic by topic in the following section, any further consideration of the methodological limitations or substantive significance of the available research being taken up in the discussion which follows.

Research results regarding the gendered character of food consumption

The selected findings regard the gendered features of preferences in regard to specific foods and types of meals, relative quantities of food consumed and concerns regarding food safety, health and weight reduction.

Preferences for specific foods

Dietary surveys in Denmark document that meat, potatoes and alcohol comprise a relatively greater proportion of men's diets compared to those of women, while fruit, vegetables, fish and sour milk products such as cottage cheese and yoghurt comprise a greater proportion of women's diets (Andersen *et al,* 1996; Haraldsdóttir *et al*, 1996). Approximately similar patterns of gendered consumption are reported in a number of dietary surveys undertaken in Northern European countries, including Great Britain, Ireland, Finland, Sweden and The Netherlands (Gregory *et al,* 1990; The Irish Nutrition & Dietetic Institute, 1990; National Public Health Institute, 1998; Becker, 1994; Löwik *et al,* 1998). Although the data presented in national survey reports are not immediately comparable, it nevertheless seems to be indisputable that a significantly greater proportion of the energy consumed by men in a range of European societies is derived from meat, animal products and alcohol, while that of women is derived from vegetable products and fruit. Differences between men and women are relatively greatest in respect of alcohol and fruit consumption respectively.

Sociological studies of food preferences have devoted less attention to the consumption of alcohol and fruit than to that of meat and vegetables. This may be due to the fact that both alcohol and fruit are seen in the everyday food cultures of many Western societies as pleasant adjuncts to a meal or as forms of optional consumption that are not socially structured by meal times. Studies of alcohol consumption have been largely undertaken in relation to problems in the areas of preventive medicine and substance abuse. Gendered patterns of consumption in regard to meat and vegetables, however, are widely noted in the literature on food culture (Andersson, 1980; Bourdieu, 1984; Twigg, 1984; Jansson, 1993; Adams, 1994; Fürst, 1995; Møhl & Holm, 1995), while not much light has been thrown upon relative differences between men and women as regards their consumption of such staple foods as bread,

potatoes, rice or pasta.

In Northern European countries, men's preference for meat and the fact that women feel they can manage very well without meat are patterns of consumption that are documented in several sociological analyses of food culture (Jansson, 1993; Pederby, 1995; Holm, 1997). A number of researchers note that meat products are commonly associated in everyday life with such qualities as strength, power and virility, and that the consumption of red meat tends for this reason to function as a symbol of masculinity (Twigg, 1984; Adams, 1987, 1994; Fiddes, 1991). Adams makes the point that meat is upheld as a powerful, irreplaceable item of food in a manner that is parallel to the dominant social position held by men (Adams, 1987), while according to Fiddes the macho steak is the visible manifestation of an idea that permeates the entire food system: that red meat is a quintessentially masculine food (Fiddes, 1991). Moreover, meat appears to function as a marker of masculinity in a transcultural manner. Anthropological research undertaken in many different cultures confirms that meat products are consumed by men to a far greater extent than by women, and it is also noted that taboos regarding food generally focus upon meat and animal products, rather than vegetables, placing restrictions on the consumption of meat by women (O'Laughlin, 1974; Brown, 1987; Adams, 1987).

Barthes presented one explanation of the gendered consumption of particular foods more than two decades ago when he observed that men tend to avoid food items that become associated with inferior status, while food items not commonly consumed by children, women or elderly people tend to be seen as masculine foods (Barthes, 1975). This is also the line of explanation offered in the report of a more recent interview survey in Stockholm in regard to the gendered consumption of sour milk products (Pederby, 1995). It is noted in respect of food habits in Sweden that cottage cheese is commonly perceived as a healthy product, and that it is frequently selected by women as a lunch-time food item. Among Swedish men, however, 84% never consume cottage cheese. On this basis the question is raised as to whether this product is perceived as being "*too* feminine", such that it is viewed by men as being an unsuitable food for them (Pederby, 1995). The consumption of cottage cheese varies considerably from one European society to another, being a relatively uncommon item for example in Great Britain. It is therefore interesting to note that the British consumption of cottage

cheese also has a gendered character - the percentage of British women who eat this product being two and a half times greater than the corresponding percentage of men, 96% of whom never eat cottage cheese (Gregory *et al*, 1990).

It is also observed in Pederby's report that men tend to avoid fruit and vegetables, viewing them as products that are messy and difficult to deal with (Pederby, 1995), although this report does not offer any interpretation of the cultural assumptions which may lie behind this behaviour pattern. On the basis of similar observations, Adams offers an interpretation which follows the line of explanation proposed by Barthes, that vegetables are viewed as women's food, making them undesirable to men (Adams, 1987).

Bourdieu notes that working class French men regard fruit and fish as unsuitable foods for men, being products that present a challenge to their identity and virility. It is felt to be difficult for large, masculine hands to cope with the small, delicate and fragile characteristics of these products. Fish, moreover, requires to be eaten in small mouthfuls and masticated with great care in the front of the mouth - a manner of eating that is seen as according very poorly with the usual eating habits of these men (Bourdieu, 1984). There do appear to be exceptions, however, to the pattern whereby working class men tend to avoid fish - communities in which fishing is a means of livelihood being one of them. An example is provided by an ethnographic study undertaken in a fishing village in Norway, where Lien found that the local pattern of consumption was one in which men ate some kinds of fish and refused to eat certain other kinds, the latter being classified in local parlance as 'non-fish' (Lien, 1995). Moreover, a relatively higher total consumption of fish among women is not a pattern found in all European countries, while in absolute terms (as measured by grams per day) men's consumption of fish exceeds that of women in several countries including Finland, Sweden and The Netherlands (National Public Health Institute, 1998; Becker, 1994; Löwik *et al*., 1998). Fish consumption among men who have higher levels of education does not appear to be documented as such in the sociological literature, but several studies of food culture report the observation that patterns of food consumption among men who have higher levels of education tend to resemble those of women (Murcott, 1983b; Pederby, 1995). More generally, a number of dietary surveys confirm a pattern of similarity between the nutritional status of women's diets on the one hand

and on the other, the diets of both men and women who have higher levels of education or higher incomes (Prättälä *et al*, 1992; Sweeting *et al*, 1994; Osler *et al*, 1990). It can therefore be assumed that the level of fish consumption among men, as well as that of fruits, vegetables and sour milk products, is also related to social class.

Alcohol products are traditionally associated with masculinity in everyday life, such that the character of alcohol as a marker of gender is sometimes taken as a given fact in sociological and anthropological research. That is to say, patterns of consumption that exclusively occur among men are sometimes described in qualitative studies without addressing the issue that this behaviour, whether it occurs in an everyday or ritualized context, is an instance of gendered behaviour. Our reading of the literature suggests that alcohol products, in much the same manner as meat products, appear to function as potent markers of masculinity in widely disparate cultures.

The report of a study of gender stereotypes and alcohol consumption undertaken among university undergraduates in the United States in the late 1980s summarises the available findings as documenting that men drink more frequently than women, that they drink faster, in greater quantities, more frequently drink beer, more frequently drink in public houses and more frequently drink with the object of becoming drunk. Drunkenness among men is also far less heavily sanctioned than among women (Landrine *et al*, 1988). This study addressed the issue as to whether these differences of behaviour reflect expectations that are specifically directed towards men, such that drinking beer and becoming drunk are perceived as aspects of a cultural stereotype of masculinity. It was confirmed that both activities do in fact belong to a stereotype of masculinity. Wine drinking was not correlated with a feminine stereotype, but rather seen as something women can do if they decide to drink. The idea that men's drinking patterns reflect the attempt to behave in accordance with gender expectations and to demonstrate masculinity is also supported by research confirming a strong correlation between hypermasculinity scores and alcohol abuse (Landrine *et al*, 1988). Dietary data from Great Britain confirm the gendered character of preferences in regard to alcohol products such as beer and wine. British men are found to have a preference for beers and spirits to a greater extent than women, while women have a preference for wines, fortified wines and liqueurs to a greater extent than men, differences being relatively greatest in respect of beers and fortified wines respectively (Gregory *et al*,

1990).

The consumption of sweet foods such as cake, biscuits, puddings, chocolate and sweets is frequently seen as a marker of femininity. A recent dietary survey in Denmark found that the consumption of sweet foods is higher among all age groups of Danish women than of men, and highest among girls in the age group 7 - 14 y (Andersen *et al*, 1996). Andersson observes that the association of sweet foods and femininity is a prevailing characteristic of Swedish food culture, one which is expressed in the structure of the food service industry, in individual preferences and in the structure of the Swedish language (Andersson, 1980). Tea shops and many coffee shops expect to cater for a predominantly female clientele who enjoy cakes as part of their refreshment. A man, who prefers to meet over an éclair, keeps a supply of *Tutti Frutti* in the drawer of his desk or opts for a pastel coloured, after dinner liqueur in preference to something stronger must be prepared, according to Andersson, to be treated as a figure of fun. Only women are described as being 'sweet' (the same term in the Swedish language referring to both the 'sweet' taste of foods and the characteristic of being 'pretty'). Andersson's reflections on these points are based upon unstructured observations of Swedish food culture, but other sources provide confirmation that his observations are also applicable to other societies.

It is reported from Japan that almost all sweet foods function as markers of femininity when eaten by adults, that the food service industry includes eating houses that serve sweet foods which are typified as feminine, and that the man who proclaims a preference for sweet foods is a comic figure (in precisely the same manner as the Japanese woman who deviates from gender expectations by drinking alcohol). Japanese norms require of men, whose eating preferences deviate from gender expectations in this regard, that they excuse their behaviour by referring to a sweet tooth (*amato*) or a sweet mouth (*amakuchi*) (Loveday & Chiba, 1985).

Preferences regarding meal types

Salads are reported as a favourite dish and meal among women, as are vegetarian dishes and soups (Twigg, 1984; Osler *et al*, 1990; Jansson, 1990, 1993; Møhl & Holm, 1995; Holm, 1997). These dishes tend to be regarded by men, on the other hand, as constituting part of a main meal rather than a proper meal as such. A proper meal for

men has been traditionally regarded by both sexes in Northern European countries as one that includes meat and potatoes, frequently accompanied by vegetables (Pederby, 1995). Among women, however, it is noted that meals that include meat are often consumed for social reasons, and not selected when women dine alone (Jansson, 1990, 1993). These findings were recently confirmed in survey investigations undertaken in both Norway and Denmark (Lien *et al*, 1998; GfK Danmark, 1998). The same pattern is reported from a content analysis of cookbooks in the United States, menus that include meat being recommended as appealing to the tastes of men, meatless menus as those that appeal to the tastes of women (Adams, 1994).

These tendencies are also identified in ethnographic and sociological investigations undertaken among working class families in Great Britain in the 1980s. The 'cooked dinner' or 'proper dinner', which a housewife was expected to serve her husband on his return home from work, was identified in a qualitative study undertaken in Wales as one that included a solid piece of fresh meat, usually grilled, boiled potatoes and a cooked green vegetable, all served as separate items on a plate. Although the quantities apportioned to different family members might differ, each was then rendered "a plateful" by the addition of gravy (Murcott, 1982, 1993). The same pattern was later identified in a survey of 200 families in Great Britain (Charles & Kerr, 1988). A tendency to deviate from the rules governing the composition of the proper dinner was emphasized in the latter study in regard to occasions when the father of the family was absent from home. On these occasions, children's preference for such items as sausages, fried fish fillets, fried egg or baked beans with chips were indulged to a greater extent. Charles and Kerr drew the conclusion that the authority of the father and his status in the family were symbolized by the ingredients of the 'proper dinner', not least the inclusion of a 'proper' piece of meat.

Andersson notes that sweet tasting deserts or puddings constitute an appendix to a main meal - a position that accords to sweet things the same position *vis-à-vis* the substance of the main course as the social position traditionally accorded to women *vis-à-vis* that of men (Andersson, 1980). Many sweet foods, however, are also consumed as a light meal or snack, tea or coffee with a biscuit or cake, and this type of snack is described as one that is often eaten by British women (Charles & Kerr, 1986). The pattern of meals among Swedish women is also described as including lighter meals and

more snack type meals compared with the pattern characteristic of men (Pederby, 1995). Significantly more women than men, however, are also inclined to skip some meals altogether, including any or all of the three more important meals of the day (Edlund, 1997; Sweeting *et al*, 1994; Charles & Kerr, 1986). Men generally tend to eat fewer, but larger meals, and are less inclined than women to skip meals (Pederby, 1995; Jansson, 1990; Sweeting *et al*, 1994). It is also reported that men are inclined to resist any attempt to make their food lighter, a pattern that is described as especially pronounced among working class men (Karisto *et al*, 1993).

Food quantities

Quite apart from the content of what is eaten, dietary surveys confirm that women consume significantly fewer calories on average than men. The quantity of food consumed during a meal is also identified in the sociological literature as a factor that functions as a marker of gender independently of the content of the meal at issue. Andersson makes the observation that early socialisation to gender identity includes a focus upon the respective quantities of food that boys and girls are expected to consume. Boys are expected to eat all before them with comparatively voracious appetites, while girls are allowed to be choosy and are expected to eat less. Greediness tends to be heavily sanctioned among girls (Andersson, 1980), a pattern that is also noted as occurring among women in a range of different cultures (see for example: Lederman, 1988).

In some cultures, the expectation that women consume less food than men is expressed in material form or in behavioural norms that allow men to complete their meal before women commence to eat. The former pattern is exemplified in Japan, where a wife's rice-bowl and chopsticks are a smaller size than those of her husband (Loveday & Chiba, 1985), while the latter pattern is reported as occurring in many traditional, agricultural societies (see for example: Brown, 1987). The quantity of food consumed tends to be popularly regarded as a matter that is self-regulated by adults in Western cultures. However, several studies document that the eating patterns of women are in fact monitored by other adults in industrialised societies, such that any tendency to eat 'too much' tends to be both self-regulated and socially sanctioned in the case of women.

This is one of the findings reported in a qualitative study of food diaries completed by college students in the United States - a report that also includes a review of the literature on this issue (Counihan, 1992). It was found that young women living at home report their fathers as monitoring the quantities they eat, strongly discouraging any signs of what they consider to be over-eating on the part of their daughters. Moreover, these young women respectively report feelings of intimidation and instances of harassment that occur when eating in the presence of men. The study concludes that women are much more likely than men to be the targets of judgmental comments made by both men and women on all topics related to eating, not least the issue of how much they eat (Counihan, 1992). This pattern was also identified during the 1980s in Great Britain in a study that reported the dissatisfaction of housewives with their personal eating habits and their experience of criticism of their body weight by their husbands and friends (Charles & Kerr, 1986). A qualitative study in which data were collected in focus groups with Australian women who had a history of dieting indicates that the social control of women's eating habits and body weight is experienced by them as sanctions exerted not only by men, but also by other women (Germov & Williams, 1996).

A quantitative investigation of gender differences in regard to the reasons given for meal termination among college students in the United States provides further partial confirmation of this pattern, particularly as it is expressed in the form of self-regulation (Zylan, 1996). Apart from the factor of satiation ('I feel full'), which was the most popular response chosen by both men and women, the second most popular response among men referred to external factors ('the food is all gone'), whereas women significantly more frequently chose responses that reflected hedonic ('the food stops tasting good') or social reasons ('everyone else is finished') or referred to the factor of restraint ('I've had all I'm allowed'). Callmer draws somewhat similar conclusions from a survey undertaken in Stockholm, noting that men appear to have an uncomplicated and direct relationship to food, eating meals that promise satiation, while women, as already noted, seem to enjoy more snacks and lighter meals that do not satiate the appetite (Pederby, 1995).

Tolerance of overweight among other people is found to be strongly gendered, such that overweight among women is subject to social sanctions to a strikingly greater

extent than overweight among men (Counihan, 1992; Sobal *et al,* 1995; Zylan, 1996). Myers and Biocca conclude from their review of research regarding the advertising of food products in mass media, that the cultural ideal of the slim, thin body is a stereotype that is exclusively directed to women (Myers & Biocca, 1992). The results of experimental studies also confirm that the cultural stereotype of the slim, thin body is a feminine stereotype. A number of studies have investigated correlations between the content and quantities of food constituting a meal – described as having been consumed by fictive, target persons – and the perception of gendered stereotypes. It is found that women who eat smaller quantities are perceived as being more feminine than women who eat larger quantities. They are also perceived as being more sexually attractive and as having a variety of stereotypical feminine qualities including such attractive features as being prettier, friendlier, more understanding and sympathetic. It is not found, however, that the quantities of food consumed by men are perceived as being related to their attractiveness (Stein & Nemeroff, 1995; Bock & Kanarek, 1995; Mooney & DeTore, 1994).

Food safety, health and weight reduction

The research results outlined thus far have focused upon particular foods, types of meals or quantities consumed in so far as these are perceived as symbolic markers of gender. It is also suggested in the literature that concerns with food safety, health, weight reduction and fitness are among the factors that may play a part in the selection of types of foods and quantities consumed by men and women. Recent research documents that women are more concerned than men with food quality and food safety issues (Wandel *et al*, 1995), that women's food habits accord with nutritional recommendations to a greater extent than those of men (Haraldsdòttir *et al*, 1996), and that women attempt to a greater extent to undertake dietary changes that are consistent with recommendations, including attempts to increase their consumption of such foods as poultry, salads, raw vegetables, fruit and wholemeal bread (Osler *et al*, 1990; Sweeting *et al*, 1994). Moreover, it has earlier been documented that women refer to the nutritious aspects of foods more frequently than men when evaluating a dish (Sellerberg, 1976), and that women have a significantly lower level of consumption of high-fat foods and more negative attitudes towards these foods (Shepherd & Stockley, 1985).

Significantly more men than women are overweight, as measured by body mass index (Gregory *et al*, 1990; The Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute, 1990; Germov & Williams, 1996). The tendency to overweight or obesity among both men and women is also identified as being strongly correlated with social class - frequency being lowest in the professional and managerial classes (Gregory *et al*, 1990). Concern with fitness (including exercise, diet and stress regulation) is reported as being widespread among both men and women and as being strongly correlated with middle and upper social class (Glassner, 1989). Concern with adhering to a slimming diet is found, however, to be significantly more widespread among women than men (Sobal *et al*, 1995; Germov & Williams, 1996).

The general tendency of research results in these areas is to identify women as having healthier eating habits than men, suggesting that health concerns are more widespread among women. However, a number of studies fail to identify health as being a salient concern for either women or men, except among those who are middle-aged or older. Studies of young people's interest in health education and the messages carried by nutrition campaigns document that such campaigns hold very little interest for young men or women. Girls and young women are, however, interested in nutrition information with a view to employing this information in their attempts to reduce weight and as a guide to their dieting behaviour (Andrews, 1991; Prättälä, 1989; Nu *et al*, 1996).

In a series of studies of Swedish children and adolescents it was found that 28% of 7 y old girls wanted to be thinner and 22% had attempted to lose weight. The frequency of reported dieting behaviour was identified as increasing with age, 68% of 16 y old girls reporting that they had dieted, as compared to 17% of boys, and 44% of girls found to be doing so on the day of the study (Edlund, 1997). Similarly high frequencies of dieting behaviour were found among young women in the United States, with 50% of women trying to lose weight at the time of data collection among 786 high school pupils as compared with 17% of young men. Moreover, 33% of young men as compared with 7% of young women were identified as trying to gain weight (Sobal *et al*, 1995).

Studies among adult women indicate that concern with slimming diets may be no less widespread among them than among young women and girls. In a survey among

200 British mothers of young children, Charles and Kerr found that 76.5% of these women had attempted slimming diets and that most of the women interviewed felt that dieting was important to them as ways of feeling fitter, better or more attractive, while health was reported as '... not often the prime mover in leading women to diet' (Charles & Kerr, 1986). In a qualitative study of reasons for undertaking planned dietary changes among American women, it was also found that weight reduction was the primary motive for undertaking such changes among all age groups of women (Devine & Olsen, 1991). A qualitative study undertaken in Australia found that weight reduction was not seen by dieting women as an issue that is related to health. Moreover, in so far as weight reduction and health were seen as conflicting with each other, it was weight reduction which was accorded priority at the expense of health (Germov & Williams, 1996).

Factors that influence healthier eating patterns are identified as being both gender specific and age dependent in a study designed to explain differences in the percentage of calories from fat in the diets of marital partners (Schafer *et al*, 1995). The factors examined were the perception of a threat of ill-health, of practical difficulties regarding food preparation, of health benefits, and of self-efficacy in regard to the goal of complying with dietary changes. It was found that the threat of ill-health was not perceived as a compelling issue among younger men or women, but was a factor that motivated older men to accept dietary changes and older women to lower the fat content of the family diet. A belief in their own ability to modify their eating habits was also found to be a significant factor among older men. The perceived practical difficulties involved in introducing a healthier diet were emphasised by younger women, but not by men in any age group. These difficulties included the expense of healthier foods, the time needed to prepare healthier meals and the perceived risk that healthier meals would not prove acceptable to their children or partner. This response was a particularly clear pattern among women with lower levels of education (Schafer *et al*, 1995).

Several studies confirm the finding that family approval of home-cooked meals is a matter of great importance to women who prepare such meals. While women may be concerned with food quality, food safety or health issues, the gratification that accrues to preparing and serving family meals lies in giving pleasure to others, a concern in everyday life that apparently outweighs any of the more distant threats of ill

health among family members (Murcott, 1983a; Ekström, 1990; Fürst, 1995; O'Doherty Jensen & Schiøler, 1996). The finding that planned dietary change is undertaken for health reasons by both sexes only when they are middle-aged or older is partially confirmed by other studies based on women as informants. Devine & Olsen found in their qualitative study of this issue that dietary changes motivated by health were implemented for personal reasons by older women who also tended to be more aware of impending threats of ill health (Devine & Olsen, 1991). In a survey of Danish women aged 30 to 60 y old, it was found that women in their fifties were significantly more likely than younger women to report having poor or fair health and to report that health motives were important determinants of food choice (Devine & Sandström, 1995).

A tendency for food discourse to be perceived or pursued as moral discourse has been noted by several researchers, prompting Germov & Williams to refer to 'morality of food' literature as a newer genre (Germov & Williams, 1996). There are clear indications that women tend to classify foods as being 'good' or 'bad', as seen in relation to such goals as slimming or keeping a clear skin, and that healthy foods tend to be categorised as 'good' foods in this regard (Chapman & Maclean, 1993; Stein & Nemeroff, 1995; O'Doherty Jensen & Schiøler, 1996; Germov & Williams, 1996). It would seem that the moral categories at issue are closely related to aesthetic concerns. No conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the available research as to whether the tendency for food discourse to become a moral or aesthetic discourse also occurs among men.

Discussion

The research reviewed here is characterised by some methodological limitations which call for caution in any attempt to summarize its results. Nevertheless, a number of clear tendencies also appear to be documented by this research, indicating specific substantive problems that call for further consideration.

Some methodological limitations of recent research

The results of dietary surveys clearly document the gendered character of dietary habits. Neither the survey design nor the format of published results, however, readily lend themselves to the task of combining a sociological analysis of food preferences with a

dietary analysis of nutritional status. Data aggregation is currently undertaken exclusively with a view to assessing nutritional status, and published results have a format which reveals very little indeed about the consumption of subsidiary food types among social groups distinguished by gender, age, social class or other social factors. Furthermore, the food classifications employed in national surveys are not internationally standardized, and subsidiary types of foods are therefore aggregated in different manners from one study to another, while data regarding the number and types of meals consumed on a regular basis are not generally made available. For these reasons, the published results of such surveys prove to have little value for the purpose of sociological analysis. It is not possible, for example, to undertake cross-cultural comparisons of gendered patterns of consumption in regard to particular foods such as different types of meat, fish or vegetables. Nor is it possible to undertake any analysis of dietary data on a national level which might provide a basis for the planning of health education in a manner that would take account of the food culture among target groups. If a sociological level of analysis were to contribute to assessments of dietary data in the future, a standardization of food classifications would be called for. Moreover, such classifications would be developed, based in part upon an assessment of the cultural significance of food categories in everyday life. Finally, sociological analyses would be undertaken in respect of disaggregated data, including data regarding the number and types of meals consumed.

Most of the studies of the gendered character of preferences for and quantities of food consumed are small scale empirical investigations. With the exception of some few contributions undertaken from the perspective of structuralism and semiotics, this work tend to be descriptive and local in character and is designed within the conceptual frameworks of one of several disciplines including the sociology or anthropology of food, family sociology, consumer behaviour theory, social nutrition or preventive medicine. These factors render any systematic comparison of results difficult, and in the review presented here no account has been taken of national, regional or local differences between food cultures. Nor has it been feasible to include a critical examination of the different manners in which such key terms as, for example, 'health' or 'health consciousness', are operationally defined in different research contexts.

Much of the data collection regarding food habits is based on women as

informants. This fact provides some basis for differentiating patterns of behaviour or orientation that occur among different groups of women. But a corresponding analysis among men cannot be undertaken on the basis of the available research. For this reason, the account of research results presented here is limited to general points of comparison between men and women, points which must be regarded as tentative until a basis for more differentiated analyses is available. With the exception of some studies of behavioural differences between boys and girls undertaken in the area of preventive medicine, there is also a dearth of information that might throw light upon children's perspectives on food or the process of socialisation to a given food culture.

In the selection of purposive or random samples, two types of population are over-represented in the literature reviewed here. These are women who are mothers of young children and samples drawn among the young men and women who are pursuing their studies at institutions of higher education. These tendencies may reflect a specific horizon of research interest as well as the convenience of overcoming the practical problems of data collection, but as sources of bias in our current understanding of food habits and food culture their influence should not be underestimated. Apart from the results yielded by dietary surveys, very little is known about food habits among the elderly, among men and women of all ages who reside alone, partners who do not have children or who have same sex partners. Nor does the available research provide a basis on which conclusions can be drawn in regard to the influence of household size and composition upon meal habits and food preferences. Literature regarding the gendered division of domestic labour has not been included here. But a review of this literature (O'Doherty Jensen & Holm, 1998) indicates that, despite the changes in gender relations that have taken place in recent decades, the division of labour in regard to domestic food preparation remains highly gendered. Our understanding of food culture would be greatly advanced by differentiated analyses of the relationship between household size and composition on the one hand and food habits on the other. It can be presumed that the influence of demographic changes in Western Europe, according to which relatively greater proportions of national populations belong to older age groups and relatively greater numbers live alone, are reflected in changing meal patterns, food habits and preferences. Future sociological research regarding food consumption and the domestic preparation of food should include a wider range of population groups. Specifically,

research is called for in regard to everyday eating habits and food preparation among men, among both men and women who live alone, and among the elderly. Interdisciplinary collaboration regarding the design of dietary surveys and the analysis of dietary data, if such were established, could also be expected to make significant contributions to the current understanding of the relationship between food consumption and household composition.

Substantive issues

Specific substantive problems that call for further research are indicated by the research results reviewed here. Firstly, the available results suggest that specific foods and types of meals function as symbolic markers of gender and of gendered status within the nuclear family. The pattern according to which the same categories of food function as markers of the same gendered status from one Western society to another suggests the possibility of identifying a systematic pattern in the relationship between these factors. It would seem fruitful to interpret these results in the light of structural analyses of the hierarchical ordering of food categories and types of meals in Western food culture. While such analyses have not focused upon the issue of gender, they nevertheless yield a basis for suggesting that the eating habits and expressed preferences of men and women are in fact regulated by the systematic application of a rule which tacitly structures their behaviour.

Twigg, for example, has contributed an account of the manner in which particular foods are hierarchically ordered in the dominant food culture of Western societies, as compared to vegetarian food culture (Twigg, 1984). The criterion employed in that analysis was the relative importance attributed to particular foods in conventional culinary practice - some being important enough to constitute the focal point of a dish or meal, others being less important in this respect. The highest position in the hierarchy of prized foods was found to be occupied by red meats, followed by the more bloodless white meats of poultry and fish. These are followed by other animal products including eggs and cheese, followed by fruit and vegetables which are ordered such that fruit has relatively highest importance, followed by leaf vegetables, root vegetables and cereals (Twigg, 1984).

The pivotal role of meat in the food culture of the British working class was

identified in the 1970s in an analysis of the structure of meals (Douglas & Nicod, 1974). It was documented that meat is commonly the 'centrepiece' of the main course of the main meal of the day accompanied by potatoes as the staple food, other foods - including vegetables - being accorded the status of 'trimmings'. Meat, it was found, can be replaced by fish or eggs, but the difference between special occasions and ordinary days in this regard is that meat is invariably the centrepiece on all more important occasions including Sundays, the number of trimmings being merely increased. The difference between the main meal and secondary or tertiary meals on an everyday basis is that other foods commonly replace meat as the centrepiece of all meals that are ranked lower than the main meal of the day. Sweet puddings, cake and biscuits were found to constitute respectively the second course of the main meal, an optional third course of a secondary meal or the only course of a tertiary meal (Douglas & Nicod, 1974). This analysis also confirmed that neither alcohol nor raw fruit are accorded any place in the meal structure of that food culture.

The importance of meat relative to vegetables as constituents of meals was also identified in a later analysis of restaurant culture in the United States in which vegetarian and conventional menus were compared (Gvion Rosenberg, 1990). It was found that when vegetables constitute the centrepiece of a vegetarian main course, they are conceptualised and treated - structured, named, shaped, dressed and textured - in a manner that is as similar to meat dishes as possible. In conventional cuisine on the other hand, meat or fish are sometimes treated in the manner of vegetables, being chopped into small pieces as a mere ingredient of a salad or first course. Their relative superiority to vegetables is maintained, however, in so far as meat or fish always assigns its name to the dish of which it is a part - whether, for instance, it is a chicken or a seafood salad (Gvion Rosenberg, 1990).

Seen in this light, the available research results regarding gendered food habits support a hypothesis to the effect that men's food preferences follow the rule of choosing the particular foods and types of meals that are located at a higher point in the hierarchies of foods and type of meals as identified respectively by Twigg (1984) and Douglas & Nicod (1974), while those of women follow the rule of choosing foods and types of meals that are located at a lower point in both hierarchies. The tacit rule which appears to account for the evidence to date is one whereby the particular foods and

types of meals that are accorded the highest status in our food culture are also the foods and meals that are deemed suitable for men, and which are tacitly treated by both men and women as symbolic markers of masculinity. The particular foods and meals that are accorded a lower status on the other hand are those that are deemed suitable for women, and which are tacitly treated by men and women as symbolic markers of femininity. In contradistinction to the research undertaken to date, this interpretation of available research results suggests that, in so far as food is a symbolic marker of gender, the signifier of symbolic meaning is not in fact to be identified at the level of particular foods as such. Rather it regards the correspondence between the hierarchical ordering of foods within a given food culture on the one hand and the hierarchical ordering of gendered status in a given society on the other hand – a correspondence which lends symbolic significance to the foods deemed suitable for men and women. Further exploration of this issue would advance our current understanding of the interplay between food culture, gender and modes of social organization.

A second issue that it would seem fruitful to explore further regards the respective quantities of food that men and women consume at a sitting. Research has shown that overt indications that a young woman is eating 'too much' tend to be sanctioned, whereas the quantity of food consumed by a young man is not usually subjected to social control. Different interpretations of this sanctioning behaviour is offered in the literature ranging from the idea that the appetite for food is associated with sexual appetite, rendering it sanctionable when displayed by women (Andersson, 1980), to the idea that the cultural ideal of the slim, thin body is a gendered expectation that women should retain a sexually desirable body shape, the sanctions accruing to overweight among women being consequently seen as a form of gender oppression (Charles & Kerr, 1986, 1988). More recent research has highlighted the fact that the body has been perceived by men as well as women in recent decades as a sign of the self, one which can be transformed by exercise, diet, and surgical means (Featherstone, 1991; Glassner, 1989). While this observation does not advance the explanation of why the sanctioning of food consumption is gendered, it adds a new dimension to the discussion. Given the relationship between concern with fitness and higher social class, the sanctioning of overweight may also be related to social class.

Future research should explore these suggestions further, and might also

fruitfully explore the extent to which body shape functions as a sign of gender difference in everyday life. Recent research indicates that body shape is the issue that preoccupies both dieting women and men engaged in bodybuilding, women hoping to decrease and men to increase body size (Germov & Williams, 1996; Sobal *et al*, 1995; Gillet & White, 1992). What is suggested here is not that body shape is a symbolic marker of gender, but rather that body shape may function as a highly visible sign of gendered status within the visual field of everyday life – a sign of difference of the kind which elsewhere has been termed an *experiential gestalt* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1981). If the body functions as a sign of gender in a manner whereby men are perceived as being typically, and perhaps ideally, taller, broader and heavier than women, and women as correspondingly smaller, thinner and lighter, it would necessarily follow that the issue of food quantity would present itself in an essentially different light for men as opposed to women. The tendency to overeat and to become overweight would have a radically different cultural significance for women as compared to men, in so far as it would be only among women that increasing size would tend to undermine body shape as a visible sign of gender difference. Further exploration of this issue may prove to be one element in the understanding of gendered relationships to food and eating as sources of pleasure and shame.

Finally, the gendered character of healthier eating habits is also an issue that calls for further exploration. Women are identified as having healthier eating habits than men. Why this is so remains unexplained in current research, not least because the assumption that a healthy diet is a salient concern for a considerable proportion of women has not been confirmed. It should therefore be noted that there are unmistakable points of correspondence between the foods recommended by nutritionists on the one hand and food that are perceived as symbolic markers of femininity on the other – both set of foods regarding those that are located lower down the hierarchies of culturally prized foods and type of meals. Recommended foods can also be perceived as eminently suited to what appears to be the gendered goal of slimming. Given these factors, nutrition education can be said to provide women with both a useful tool and a legitimation in the pursuit of such ideals as becoming, and being seen to be, both feminine and slim. A corollary of these observations should also be noted: the likelihood that men perceive dietary recommendations as markers of emasculation.

While these observations by no means exhaust this complex topic, it would seem worthwhile to explore the possibility that nutrition information is useful to women in the pursuit of their personal goals, without being perceived as providing relevant cues in regard to the needs of growing children or male partners. It would also seem worthwhile to explore men's perceptions and assessments of the foods and types of meals recommended by dietary experts. The observation that nutritional status is related to social class as well as gender should also be considered in the light of these perspectives, orientation to the goal of gender equality on the one hand and concern with body trimness on the other both being factors that are related to higher social class. In this light, the concerns of men and women with personal health, family health and the monitoring of health behaviours in everyday life should be addressed in future research.

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Food Categorization: A Key to Understanding Cognitive Difficulties in Responding to Food Frequency Questions[1]

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Abstract:

Objective: To improve the quality of food frequency questionnaires (FFQ) by elucidating cognitive difficulties involved in responding to food frequency questions.

Methods: Qualitative analysis of data collected from Danish men in two semi-structured focus groups concerning 10 questions selected from the FFQ employed by the Danish Nutrition Council every third year in a national survey undertaken by telephone interview. Difficulties in responding to this FFQ were identified in the light of concepts drawn from cognitive research.

Results: Cognitive difficulties were identified in responding to 8 of 10 questions examined, 6 of which concerned the categorization of foods. The central difficulty in 5 cases arose from the use of 'superordinate' or 'subordinate' food categories in the formulation of questions, as distinct from 'basic' food categories. Half of the questions examined thus gave rise to problems of misunderstanding or recall on the part of respondents, leading to underestimations or occasional overestimations of frequencies. In each case, a disparity between the meaning of the food category as understood by researchers and respondents respectively was identified. Other cognitive difficulties concerned the calculation of frequencies, some of which reflected irregular intake. All cognitive difficulties reflected the variable role of food groups within the meal system of respondents.

Conclusions: The examination of food categories, when informed by the findings of cognitive science, yields a key to understanding problems that arise in responding to food frequency questions and thereby to improving the quality of questionnaires.

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Descriptors: FFQ, cognition, categorization, meal structure, dietary habits, qualitative method.

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Introduction

The classification of a food item as being 'one of a *kind*', i.e. as belonging to a particular food category, is a central issue in the design of food frequency questionnaires. Successful communication between researchers and respondents depends upon the extent to which the food categories employed in the questionnaire correspond with those which respondents use in practice. The fact that particular categories, as formulated, may have different meanings for different people is widely acknowledged in those fields of social research in which disparities between 'expert' and 'lay' comprehension of a given topic is recognized (Wynne 1998; Lassen *et al.* 2001). This problem is not widely recognised by nutritionists and epidemiologists, however, in regard to the measurement of dietary habits. The present study was designed to identify such disparities and to characterize the cognitive difficulties experienced by respondents.

The questionnaire selected for evaluation is designed for data collection by telephone interview, and is currently employed by the Danish Nutrition Council in triennial measures of dietary habits. It has been tested in regard to reproducibility and compared with data regarding the previous day's intake (Haraldsdóttir *et al.* 1999, 2001). Some measures have a high level of reproducibility (e.g. rye bread), while others have not (e.g. fruit). The objective of the present study was to undertake an exploratory investigation of the extent to which improvements in this questionnaire might be made on the basis of qualitative data, analysed in the light of a conceptual framework drawn from cognitive research. The primary aim was to identify the cognitive difficulties encountered by respondents in regard to question formulations and in regard to estimating frequencies. A central issue was that of identifying the extent to which the food categories employed in this FFQ are understood and used in a similar manner by the research team on the one hand and by respondents on the other.

Conceptual framework

Three sets of concepts regarding category usage in everyday life were deemed relevant and have been employed in the analysis of data. They are drawn from research in cognitive semantics (Lakoff 1987; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999), originally inspired by the pioneering work of Rosch and colleagues in cognitive psychology (Rosch, 1978, 1981, Rosch *et al.*, 1976), and from research in cognitive anthropology regarding food habits and food categorization in everyday life (Douglas, 1992, 1984; Douglas & Gross, 1981; Douglas & Nicod, 1974). These

concepts are outlined below.

Food categories: subordinate, basic and superordinate levels

Categorization refers to the process of classification whereby any given object, event, activity or abstract entity is perceived, thought of, spoken about or treated as being 'one of a *kind'*. It is thus a fundamental process of all human cognition, whereby a number of objects are conceived as equivalent. A set of categories that are related to each other by means of class inclusion constitute a taxonomy within any given area of everyday life. The vertical dimension of such a set (collie, dog, mammal, animal) regards increasing levels of inclusiveness and abstraction, more general categories occupying one end of a continuum and more specific categories the other. General categories are termed 'superordinate', while specific categories are termed 'subordinate'. The categories that are termed 'basic' tend to occupy a mid-point of such a continuum (see Fig. 1).The words in a given language that name basic categories are found to be among those most frequently used, and are also those first learned by children. Most of the stock of knowledge available in any given social group is organised in regard to basic-level categories, and it is at this level that objects, events and activities are most easily distinguished, learned, recognised and remembered.

When physical objects (category members) are discerned as belonging to one basic-level category rather than another ('dog' as opposed to 'bird' or 'table'), they are commonly distinguished by means of their shape and by our typical motor movements in interacting or dealing with them. These criteria cannot be usefully employed in regard to distinguishing between categories at other levels ('collie' as opposed to 'terrier' or 'animal' as opposed to 'furniture'). For these reasons, categories at the basic-level are said to have psychological primacy. The cognitive processing of superordinate categories is relatively more complex. Being more abstract, they do not correspond to any given perceptions or mental image in which the characteristics of all category members can be pictured. Likewise, the processing of subordinate categories is relatively more complex, since they call for closer attention to more specific characteristics, and many of the attributes of one subordinate kind ('collie' or 'kitchen table') are in fact the same as those of another subordinate kind ('terrier' or 'dining table' respectively). The words in a given language that refer to either superordinate or subordinate categories are less frequently used in everyday life than those referring to basic categories, and they are also acquired later in childhood.

Superordinate	**Basic level**	**Subordinate**
Animal	Dog	Collie
		Terrier
	Bird	Robin
		Ostrich
Furniture	Table	Kitchen table
		Dining table
	Chair	Armchair
		Deckchair
Plant	Corn	Wheat
		Barley
	Flower	Tulip
		Daffodil

Fig. 1: Examples of taxonomies used in basic-level cognitive research (adapted from Rosch, 1978).

Since basic-level categories have psychological primacy, it might be expected that such categories are universal, or at least common to all adult members of a given language community. It is found for example that basic-level categories, which name plants and animals at the level of the genus (‘dog’, ‘cow’, ‘pig’, ‘wheat’, ‘rye’, etc.), tend to be cross-cultural and correspond to scientific categories extremely accurately at this basic level, but not accurately at superordinate or subordinate levels (Lakoff, 1987:34). However, the human capacity to distinguish relevant characteristics may be either under-utilized or specialized, both of which tend to undermine the universality of basic-level categories in practice. Categories that are basic for some population groups therefore may not be so for others. For instance, the category ‘corn’, referring to the kind of yellow or green plant that grows in a farmer’s field, may constitute a basic category among the members of an urban population, ‘wheat’, ‘rye’, ‘oats’, ‘barley’, etc. functioning as subordinate categories. Among the

members of a rural community, however, it is likely that the latter function as basic categories, subordinate categories referring to varieties of each kind, while ‘corn’ would function as a superordinate category. For these reasons, the task of identifying the basic category level among a given population is a matter for empirical investigation.

The important implication of these considerations in the present context is that the cognitive operations required of respondents to a FFQ will partly depend on whether the food group/category referred to by a particular question is one that belongs to the culturally familiar basic level or to one of the other levels. One objective of the analysis undertaken in the present study therefore was to elucidate whether this conceptual framework might throw some light on the cognitive difficulties encountered by respondents to a FFQ and upon communication difficulties between the research team and respondents which appear to arise from this.

Prototypes and prototype effects

The concept ‘prototype’ regards the horizontal dimension of categories at the same level of abstraction. It refers to the internal structure of a given category, whereby some objects (category members) are spontaneously regarded as constituting better examples of a particular category than are other objects (Rosch, 1978). Logically speaking, an object either belongs to a particular category or it does not, and the problem of better or worse examples should not arise. However, experimental research in cognitive psychology demonstrates that many categories are in fact distinguished from each other by reference to prototypical examples. For example, when respondents are requested to make a list of items belonging to a particular category, some exemplars come readily to mind, while others evade recall. The former are the prototypical members of the category at issue. Experimental studies reveal for instance that respondents acknowledge ‘robin’, ‘penguin’ and ‘ostrich’ as belonging to the category ‘bird’, but they nevertheless identify ‘robin’ as being a better exemplar of that category than either of the other kinds of bird (Rosch & Mervis, 1975, Rosch 1978; Lakoff, 1987; Gibbs, 1999). ‘Prototype effects’ refer to the consequences of this phenomenon for processes of categorization and recall as they take place in practice.

Prototypes and their effects may be implicated in tendencies to recall one or more foods within a food group/category and to overlook others while responding to frequency questions, resulting in underestimations of the frequency with which a food group is

consumed. These phenomena have not yet been investigated in regard to the reporting of dietary habits. In the present study, we set out to explore whether one or more food items, as referred to and discussed by respondents, appeared to function as the prototype of a particular food category, and of any effects this phenomenon might have on patterns of response to food frequency questions.

Socially structured food habits

Food habits are cultural practices that are socially structured. In social research 'meals' are sometimes distinguished from other occasions on which food and drink are consumed as concerning rule-bound combinations and sequences of items consumed. In so far as meals are shared social events, they also tend to be constrained by rules which prescribe time, place, duration and sequence of actions. 'Snacks' on the other hand are unstructured food events in which one or more self-contained items of food or drink, such as an apple or coffee and cake, are consumed by the individual, but in which there are no rules prescribing the combinations, sequences, timing or locations that are permitted (Douglas & Nicod 1974; Douglas & Gross 1981; Douglas 1983). On this basis, it might be expected: (1) that the frequency and regularity of any individual's food habits will depend upon the extent to which items are consumed in accordance with a culturally accepted meal system, and (2) that foods which recurrently constitute central and visible parts of such meals will tend to function as basic categories among the consumers at issue. In the present study, the decision was made to seek to identify the extent to which the food categories under investigation refer to products that are consumed within the meal system of respondents, and what implications this might have for the processing of questions and estimations of frequencies.

Subjects and methods

Subjects

Eight men were recruited to each of two focus groups by means of a screening instrument administered by telephone interview. Two focus groups constitute the minimum number that can fulfil the quality demands of an exploratory study of this kind. While the original sample thus comprised sixteen persons, four failed to attend. Data were therefore collected from a total of 12 participants (5 and 7 in each group, respectively).

Subjects were recruited according to the following inclusion criteria: men, 25-50

yrs, resident in the greater Copenhagen area and members of a household that comprise a minimum of two persons. Exclusion criteria were: post-graduate academic education in any field, and employment, education or vocational training within the areas of cookery, food production, food marketing or nutrition. These criteria were designed to increase the homogeneity of the groups and thus the likelihood that discussion would flow freely among participants, these considerations being important in recruitment to focus groups. Recruitment was undertaken by a professional market research company, and subjects were sent written confirmation of the venue for the group discussion as well as a brief description of its composition, duration and purpose.

Method of data collection

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed for use in the present study, based upon recognized principles regarding the collection of qualitative data by means of focus groups (Morgan 1997, Krueger 1988). The schedule included practical tasks to be undertaken by respondents in relation to each of the main topics for discussion. The time allocated to each task was planned, the duration of each session being two hours, and standardised questions were prepared on each main topic. Interviews were moderated by one of the researchers (JyH), and took place on the campus of the Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Copenhagen in a neutral setting far removed from the Nutrition Department. The schedule and technical equipment were tested in a pilot study prior to the present study (n=5). Each session was audio- and videotaped.

Data collection was made in respect of 10 food groups selected from the FFQ currently employed by the Danish Nutrition Council. The interview schedule included four main topics which were addressed in the following order:

1) The questions selected from the FFQ were administered as a series of open questions read aloud by the moderator, responses being noted by each participant on a registration sheet. This task was designed to give participants a first-hand experience of how it feels to respond to a questionnaire of this kind. A secondary purpose was to yield data which would indicate any clear deviations from common dietary habits.

2) Ten food products, selected in the light of food groups measured by the FFQ, were placed in the centre of the table at which participants were seated. Participants were then requested

to place these products in a row, ranked such that the least healthy items were placed at one end and the most healthy items at the other. This task, undertaken in common, was designed to provide data on the respondents' conceptions of the food products and categories at issue. Health was selected as a criterion that would be discussed in the process of assessing product qualities, given the accepted view that health considerations play a role in biased reporting of the frequency with which particular products are consumed.

3) Each of the frequency questions that had already been presented orally to participants (Task 1) were presented once more, this time in a written version as a set of cards, each of which bore a single question in large print. Participants were requested to sort these cards into two bundles, placing all questions that had been easy to answer on one side and those that had been more difficult on the other. This task, also undertaken in common, was designed to provide data on the cognitive difficulties encountered in responding to such questions. Apart from spontaneous discussion among participants, follow-up questions were posed by the moderator in regard to each issue that arose.

4) The pre-coded frequency responses as employed in this FFQ when administered by telephone interview were presented and their purpose briefly explained. Participants were then requested to compare these with their personal responses (Task 1) as noted on their registration sheets and to raise any disparities for discussion. This task was designed to provide further data which would serve as a basis for evaluating this FFQ.

A personal interview was undertaken with the leader of the research team (JóH) that had developed this FFQ on behalf of the Nutrition Council. These data served to clarify the intended meaning of questions as formulated.

Method of data analysis

The data for analysis were interview data obtained from the leader of the Nutrition Council research team and complete transcripts of audiotapes made during each focus group discussion, supplemented by videotapes of the discussion and observations noted by the moderator. Transcripts were coded using the *Text Base Alpha* computer programme (Kristensen & Sommerlund 1987), data being grouped according to topic and food category. A content analysis of this text was undertaken in respect of each food category according to recognized principles (Kvale 1994). The results presented here are thus based upon a

systematic analysis of transcribed and coded audiotapes. This content analysis was undertaken by two researchers (JyH and KO'DJ), interpretations and conclusions being subject to consensus.

Results

All twelve participants were men resident in the greater Copenhagen area. Mean age was 38 yrs. (range 27-50). Eight participants were living with a wife or partner and child/children, two with a partner only, one with a child only, and one with a friend. All were employed, and while two had no further education than primary school, a majority (10) had received vocational training or post-secondary school education. None had completed a university education at post-graduate level. The food frequencies reported by participants were similar to those of men in the national sample.

Discussion in both focus groups on each of the main topics followed broadly similar lines. The cognitive difficulties encountered by respondents in regard to the interpretation and processing of question formulations are summarily presented here as 'category problems'. Those which concern the task of estimating an answer, i.e. estimating the frequency with which a given food group was consumed, are termed 'frequency problems'.

Category problems

Eight of the 10 food categories examined had been intended by the research team to refer to familiar food groups, i.e. had been conceived as food categories at what has been termed here a basic level (*cf.* conceptual framework above). It had been clear to the team that 'fish with bread' ('*fiskepålæg'* in Danish) was an unusual and broad (superordinate) category and that its formulation did not correspond to everyday usage. For this reason cue words (*herring, mackerel in tomato-sauce, cod's roe, etc*.) had been added to the question formulation in order to facilitate response. The superordinate character of the term 'fruit', as embracing a wide variety of kinds of fruit, had been implicitly recognised by the research team, in that cue words (*apple, orange, banana*) also had been supplied in this case. It had not been expected that any of the remaining 8 food groups/categories would give rise to cognitive difficulties among respondents. (See Table 1.)

It emerged from the analysis, however, that only half of these 10 food categories

were in fact understood by respondents as referring to familiar food groups at what we have termed the basic level. These were: ‘rye bread’, ‘salad/raw shredded vegetables’, ‘potatoes’, ‘meat as a main meal’ and ‘rice/pasta’. Among the remaining 5 categories, 2 (‘cooked vegetables’ and ‘milk’) were clearly treated by respondents as referring to subordinate categories, while 3 (‘fruit’, ‘fish with bread’ and ‘fish as a main meal’) were treated by a majority as superordinate categories. Among the general tendencies which will be illustrated in the following were that respondents experienced very little difficulty in responding to questions referring to ‘basic’ food categories. When questions were understood as referring to a ‘subordinate’ food category, their formulation gave rise to problems of interpretation. When they were understood as referring to a ‘superordinate’ food category, respondents reported that it was difficult to recall the kinds of foods that should be taken into account (see Table 1). Difficulties of interpretation and of recall gave rise to disparities between the respondents’ comprehension of the food category at issue and that of the research team. This in turn tended to lead to underestimations of the frequencies with which these foods were consumed.

In the case of ‘cooked vegetables’ and ‘milk’, difficulties and disparity were due to the fact that respondents interpreted the question as referring to a narrower range of food products than that intended by the research team, i.e. as referring to a subordinate category. Frequency of consumption was then estimated in regard to this subordinate range. For example, ‘cooked vegetables’ had been understood by the research team as a category that refers to all vegetables which constitute a visible part of a hot meal, disregarding the method of cooking at issue.

Furthermore, for many respondents the prototype of ‘cooked vegetables’ appeared to be those that are over-cooked, being prepared in the traditional, old-fashioned manner in which they are “*...boiled to a mush*”, as expressed by one respondent. (“*It’s the sort of thing you get when you visit your grandparents....*”; “*...I eat broccoli too, but then just barely steam-cooked... that’s the sort of thing I like! That’s not the sort of thing I’d thought of at all. I’d pictured that sort of mush you heave out of the freezer, put in a pot, drain in a colander and then sling on to a plate...”*.) Some respondents were aware of a possible ambiguity and confused by it. (*”Do blanched vegetables count too?*”; “*Stir-fried don’t count, do they...?*”; “*I eat a lot of fried stuff - what do you call it? Wok stuff - and I just can’t compare that to*

‘*cooked vegetables*’.”) It became clear that these problems of interpretation also had

Table 1: Respondents' 'category problems' and disparities of comprehension between respondents and research team

Food groups/ categories as formulated:	**Category level as perceived by respondents:**	**Prototype:**	**Disparity of category comprehension:**	**Respondent's felt difficulties in regard to food category:**
'Rye bread'	Basic	None	None	None
'Salad/raw shredded vegetables'	Basic	None (any freshly chopped vegetables)	None	None
'Potatoes'	Basic	Fresh home-cooked: part of main meal	None	Occasional: whether to include chips, crisps, etc.
'Meat as a main meal'	Basic	The 'centrepiece' of main meal	Occasional: tendency to count non-meat centre-piece as 'meat'	None
'Rice/pasta'	Basic	None	None	None
'Cooked vegetables'	Subordinate	Vegetables boiled to a 'mush'	Tendency to discount vegetables cooked by other methods.	Whether other cooking methods should be counted
'Milk'	Subordinate	Milk drunk from a glass	Tendency to discount milk consumed in other forms.	Whether milk as ingredient of other foods/drinks should be counted
'Fruit'	(1) Superordinate (2) Basic	(1) Fresh fruits (2) A particular kind of 'healthy food'	Tendency to over-look some kinds of fresh fruits and all processed products. Tendency to include all kinds of fruit products	Difficult to recall many kinds None
'Fish with bread'	Superordinate	Fresh fish	Tendency to over-look processed (less 'healthy') products	Difficult to recall many kinds
'Fish as a main meal'	(1) Superordinate (2) Subordinate	Fresh fish A particular kind of 'centrepiece' of main meal	None Occasional: tendency to count fish as 'meat'	Difficult to recall due to infrequency Difficult to distinguish/recall

consequences for estimations of frequency. An illustration of this is provided by a comment one participant added on his registration sheet. His written response to this question had been: "*Maximum once per week*". While the additional comment was: "If stir-fried vegetables counted, my answer would be four times per week approximately".

Precisely similar problems arose in regard to the question: "*How often do you drink milk?*" – reflecting a tendency to interpret the question literally and narrowly as milk that is drunk (from a glass) and to discount milk taken in the form of cocoa, with breakfast cereals, etc. Once again, some respondents had merely adopted the narrow interpretation, while others raised the issue of interpretation as such, and once again the narrow interpretation of a food category (i.e. at a subordinate level relative to the intended category) tended to lead to underestimations of actual consumption, relevant food items being discounted from the response given.

A different kind of difficulty was encountered in responding to questions in which foods had been grouped into a relatively broad (superordinate) category. These food categories did not correspond to more familiar words in everyday use, and the main difficulty experienced by respondents concerned their awareness of the need to recall many different kinds of products. This pattern can be exemplified in regard to the question: "*How often do you eat fruit (for example, apples, oranges, bananas)?"* It transpired that a majority of participants in both focus groups did not in fact usually think of themselves as eating 'fruit' as such, but rather as "*grabbing an apple*", "*eating Christmas tangerines*" or "*being tempted by new strawberries*". It seems that these various food groups (distinct basic categories) are not usually thought of in practice as being 'one of a kind'. ("*Those questions ['rice/pasta' and 'meat'] are quite easy to answer compared to 'fruit'. What is 'fruit', after all? It could be oceans of things... It's because 'fruit' covers so many things... It confused me.*") In the terms of this analysis, 'fruit' constituted a superordinate category for these respondents, rendering it difficult for them to spontaneously recall the many kinds of products that are subsumed by this term and which, if recalled, would be relevant to their responses.

The kinds of 'fruit' that were in fact recalled were primarily varieties of fresh fruits, and it was clear that these were generally viewed as healthy products. It would seem that fresh as opposed to processed products functioned as prototypes of the category 'fruit'. This interpretation is supported by the fact that respondents claimed that 'fruit' was eaten as a

snack between meals and did not form any part of their meals. Moreover, they maintained this view despite the fact that discussion revealed many instances in which processed fruit products were in fact consumed as ingredients of meals. Processed variants tended to be thought of in practice as belonging to other categories of food than 'fruit', for example 'puddings' (fruit tart with cream), 'non-alcoholic drinks' (fruit juice), 'dinner ingredients' (tinned pineapple added to a wok dish), 'breakfast dishes' (raisins and dried fruit with muesli), etc. These 'prototype effects' (*cf.* conceptual framework above) appear to reflect the ways in which foods are grouped and categorized in the contexts of shopping, meal preparation and consumption as contrasted with that of nutrition. However, the fact that fresh fruits functioned as prototypes of 'fruit' served to facilitate data collection in this instance, since the research team had intended to measure the frequency of consumption of fresh products, and had indicated this with the help of cue words.

For a minority of respondents, however, for whom 'health' was a salient factor in their everyday lives, these different kinds of fruit products were in fact linked together as a single category in everyday use, heightening their awareness of fruit consumption as such. For this small group, 'fruit' appeared to function as a 'basic' category, seemingly influenced by nutritional information. ("*... so I try to make sure that I have some fruit with me every day... When I get to the fruit section [in the supermarket], then I know that when I leave here I have to have something or other - preferably something in nature's own packaging - to put in my lunch box... Something here has to go into the trolley - for health reasons - there's no doubt about that...*") While the more general pattern among respondents was such that recall of fruit consumption was deemed to be a difficult and uncertain matter, the discussion serving to remind participants of products that should have been taken into account in offering a response, this pattern did not obtain among the health-conscious minority. This difference in patterns of recall may very well yield different patterns of response, whereby a majority of respondents tend to underestimate their consumption of fruit, while this tendency does not appear to obtain among a health-conscious minority.

'Fish' was also conceived by respondents as referring to a very wide variety of products, i.e. as a superordinate category. At issue here was the problem of calling to mind different kinds of fish dishes that bear very little visual resemblance to each other. The point was made that some products come to mind when 'fish with bread' is thought of as referring

to an everyday lunch, whereas quite different products and dishes come to mind in respect of a more festive lunch menu or the first course of a dinner menu. Once again, both focus groups made it clear that it was the discussion of this question which had served to remind participants of relevant products. It was also clear that fresh as opposed to processed products functioned as prototypes of the category 'fish', supported as in the case of 'fruit' by a tendency to regard this food group as 'healthy'. In the case of 'fish', however, the tendency to distinguish "*proper*" fish (i.e. prototypical fresh products) from those that are "... *not really fish*" (i.e. tinned and other manufactured products) did not serve to facilitate data collection, since it had been consumption of the latter products the research team had intended to measure by means of a question regarding 'fish with bread'. Difficulties of recall on the part of respondents, who do not in fact think of themselves as consuming a variety of 'fish' while enjoying a tuna as opposed to a cheese sandwich, much less as eating "*proper*" fish, clearly tended to give rise to underestimations of the frequency with which items belonging to this food group are in fact consumed.

When both the research team and respondents understood a food category as referring to a familiar food group at what has here been termed the 'basic' level, respondents reported virtually no difficulty in regard to the interpretation of questions. These food categories corresponded to familiar parts of particular meals and were easily recalled. While it might be thought that 'meat' is a broad and superordinate category, it became clear that the prototype of 'meat' is in fact the centrepiece of the main meal as presented on a plate. This clearly facilitated recall by endowing what would otherwise be a wide range of products with a common characteristic, giving 'meat' the character of a basic level category. Prototypical potatoes were also the fresh variety, prepared and served as an ingredient of the main meal. This prototype served to facilitate data collection since the research team had not intended to include the consumption of potato salads in lunch menus or that of potato crisps or French fries consumed as snacks. Some few respondents, however, were aware that potatoes in dinner menus are one (subordinate) kind among others, and they expressed uncertainty as to the kinds of potato products that should be taken into account. This was the only exception to the typical pattern, whereby basic food categories did not give rise to any problems of interpretation. In regard to difficulties of recall, only one problem was identified regarding food categories at the basic level. Interestingly, this problem was not reported as a difficulty

by respondents, but was identified in the course of analysis. It is exemplified by one respondent, who claimed in the course of discussion that he always ate fish as a main meal on a particular day of the week, but had nevertheless written on his registration sheet that he consumed 'meat as a main meal' 7 days per week. Disparity on this point may be due to a 'prototype effect', whereby the centrepiece of the main meal tends to be labelled as 'meat', even when the product at issue is not a meat product. It is noted here, since it may indicate a more general tendency to overestimate meat consumption, particularly when reported by children or by adults who do not prepare the meals they consume.

Disregarding the extent to which respondents had been aware of uncertainty about the meaning of questions or of difficulty in recalling relevant items, the occurrence of what we have termed 'category problems' appears to undermine the validity of frequency measures. These problems concern the identification and recall of precisely *which* foods should be taken into account while estimating a response to a given question. Relevant food groups are discounted in the event that a question is comprehended as referring to a subordinate food category, while they are overlooked by evading recall when a question refers to a superordinate food category. What we have termed 'frequency problems' on the other hand refer to felt difficulties in doing the actual counting and in estimating an "average" or "usual" frequency.

Frequency problems

Most participants in both focus groups expressed some dissatisfaction with the accuracy of the responses they had been able to offer to some questions. The general view was that offering inaccurate answers was merely a way of wasting one's own time as well as that of the interviewer, such that nothing was gained by it. Difficulties in regard to accuracy therefore tended to be reported as being somewhat frustrating. Analysis revealed that these difficulties concerned: (1) the calculation of frequency in regard to irregular consumption, and (2) complex calculations of summation and division when more than one frequency was at issue (see Table 2). The latter difficulty arose in so far as the food items under consideration were not conceived as being '*one* of a kind', but rather as distinctly different foods that are consumed with different frequencies (e.g. 'rice/pasta', different kinds of 'fruit' or 'fish with bread'). It follows from the character of superordinate categories that the

problem of complex

Table 2: Respondents 'frequency problems'

Food groups/ Categories as formulated:	**Seasonal influences:**	**Structural influences of the meal system:**	**Respondent's pattern of consumption:**	**Respondent's felt difficulties in estimating frequencies:**
'Rye bread'	None	Part of *lunch* menu	Regular Frequent	None
'Salad/raw shredded vegetables'	Higher seasonal intake (Summer period)	- Optional part of *dinner* or *lunch* menus - An extra course in *guest* menus	Irregular Variable	Calculation of irregularity
'Potatoes'	Higher seasonal intake (new potatoes)	- Part of *dinner* menu: main course - Snack foods	Irregular Frequent Irregular Variable	Calculation of irregularity
'Meat as a main meal'	None	Part of *dinner* menu: main course	Regular Frequent	None
'Rice/pasta'	None	- Structural alternatives to potatoes in *dinner* menus - Optional part of *lunch* menus	Irregular Different frequencies at issue Irregular Low frequency	Complex calculation Calculation of irregularity
'Cooked vegetables'	Seasonal variations (kinds of vegetable, not intake)	Optional part of *dinner* menu: main course	Irregular Variable	Calculation of irregularity
'Milk'	None	Optional part of *all* menus	Regular Variable	None
'Fruit'	High levels of seasonal variation (for kinds of fruit)	- Predominantly snack foods - Optional ingredient of *all* menus	Irregular Different frequencies at issue	Complex calculation
'fish with bread'	None	- Optional part of *lunch* menus - Optional part of *guest* menus: first course	Irregular Different frequencies at issue	Complex calculation
'Fish as a main meal'	None	Optional alternative to 'meat' in *dinner* menus	Irregular Low frequency	Calculation of irregularity

calculation is likely to arise whenever such categories are at issue. It became clear in the

course of discussion that responses in these cases tended to be particularly unreliable and were sometimes openly acknowledged as such by respondents.

The structure of the meal system appeared to exert a pervasive influence on the frequency and regularity with which most food groups were consumed. In marked contrast, both seasonality and personal or family preferences only appeared to influence the frequency or regularity with which some few food groups were consumed. Several respondents reported a higher consumption of raw vegetables and new potatoes in the summer period, while the regularity with which milk, pasta and rice were consumed appeared to reflect personal or family preferences. Seasonality influenced the varieties of 'cooked vegetables' and 'fruit' consumed, but not apparently the level of intake as such. The only exception to this pattern was identified among participants who had a markedly low level of consumption of fresh fruits, but who increased their intake when given access to particular fruits in season.

Regular patterns of consumption were related to food groups that occupied a stable place in the meal system ('rye bread' in lunch menus, which is traditional fare among Danes, and 'meat as a main meal') Irregular patterns and variable frequencies were related to food groups that occupied optional or variable parts of such meals ('potatoes' and 'rice/pasta' as options that substitute each other in dinner menus, 'cooked vegetables' and 'fish as main meal' as optional features of dinner menus, 'salad/raw shredded vegetables' as optional features of lunch and dinner menus and as an extra course in guest menus, 'fish with bread' in lunch menus and as first course in dinner menus, and processed 'fruit' products as optional ingredients of all menus).

While 'milk' is also an optional ingredient of most menus, its consumption appeared to follow highly regular patterns and, as already noted, was influenced by personal preference. Finally, fresh fruits did not occupy any place in the meal system, being predominantly consumed as snack foods. Pronounced difficulty was reported in regard to estimating the frequency with which fresh fruits were consumed, in that respondents were unable to relate their intake to any particular type of meal, course, dish or other regularly recurring event ("*It's between meals. Well, whenever - you just grab it...*"). But difficulties were in fact reported in regard to all food groups that occupied optional or variable parts of menus within the meal system, whereas no respondent reported any difficulty in estimating the frequency of their consumption of 'rye bread' or 'meat as a main meal'.

In the case of three food groups, the particular difficulty presented was that of complex calculation. A response called for the estimation of a single frequency, but when two or more foods were at issue, each of which was consumed with a different frequency, the task of estimation was rendered more complex. For example, rice and pasta were consumed in most households with different frequencies, while the question posed (*How often do you eat rice/pasta?*) called for the estimation of a single frequency. ("*Well, I had to use a couple of more seconds for this one, because, well, because one just has to find out - does one eat rice and pasta equally often or... Anyway, I thought, we eat more pasta at home. So then, how on earth do I answer this?...*") This difficulty was greatly compounded when a wide range of different products consumed with different frequencies was at issue (i.e. the superordinate categories 'fruit' and 'fish'). The difficulty of estimating an average consumption is illustrated by one respondent, whose relatively infrequent and highly irregular consumption of fruit was strongly influenced by seasonality, and was described as follows: "*It takes you aback that - how often fruit? Now that depends on 'when': I had to sit there working out Christmas fruit, adding that to the fruit trees in the garden during the Autumn and at different times, kind of thing, and trying to find some kind of average. So I think that [question] was a bit difficult... I mean the rest of the year it [personal fruit consumption] doesn't amount to much – maybe once or twice a week...*" The response noted on his registration sheet had been: "*3-4 times per week*". That written response might well be regarded as being rather more a 'shot in the dark' than a solution to an exercise in calculation. Similar observations suggest a pattern whereby calculation as such tends to be abandoned in favour of guess-work when the task of estimating an average proves too complex. It would seem likely that guess-work of this kind tends to err on the side of overestimation when the foods at issue are conceived as 'healthy' products, thus overriding a more general concern to respond with accuracy.

Improving the quality of a food frequency questionnaire

On the basis of these findings, the quality of a FFQ would be improved by measures which address: (a) problems of interpretation in regard to which kinds of food should be included in, and excluded from, a given response, (b) problems of recall that arise when a given food category covers a wide range of products, (c) problems of recall and calculation that arise due

to infrequent or irregular intake, and (d) problems of complex calculation that arise when a response is estimated on the basis of two or more products, each of which is consumed with a different frequency. The problem in regard to (c) above is not primarily a cognitive one, but rather regards the pattern of intake as such. Nevertheless, such patterns raise a cognitive problem: how can a response with a satisfying degree of precision be given? On the basis of these observations, several specific suggestions for improving the FFQ employed by the Danish Nutrition Council could be made (Halkjær, 1999). Some considerations, based upon observations in the present study, may prove useful in assessments of FFQ design more generally.

It would seem that 'category problems' could be alleviated by undertaking an assessment of the precise range of food products, dishes, meal types and/or snacks at issue in the design of each question. Our observations suggest that three criteria are likely to prove useful in this regard. The first criterion regards product characteristics, and arises from observations of prototype effects: whether or not the food group at issue includes or is intended to include only fresh varieties, processed varieties, or both. This criterion is particularly important in assessing question formulations that regard the intake of fish, fruit, potatoes and other vegetable products. The second criterion regards an assessment of the role of the given range of products within the meal system of respondents, so far as this is known: whether the food group at issue has a fixed place in the meal system, a variable place in different types of meals, is an optional feature of a specific meal type or dish and/or is consumed as a snack food. This criterion is relevant in assessing all question formulations, but particularly those which concern foods that are consumed as snacks or constitute optional or variable features of meal menus. For example, calling to mind the fact that milk is a familiar and optional feature of breakfast menus would serve to pinpoint the inadequacy of a question formulation which suggests that milk is only consumed as a beverage. The third criterion is suggested by the conceptual framework employed in the present study: the likelihood that a given question refers to a basic, subordinate or superordinate food category, as understood from the vantage point of respondents. This criterion is most usefully employed when the precise range of foods which a given question is designed to measure has been specified. In the event that a sub-group of products is at issue (i.e. a subordinate category), question formulations supplemented by the provision of cue words should serve to

clearly indicate this range, i.e. the products, dishes or meals to be included/excluded by respondents. In the event that a wide range of products is at issue (i.e. superordinate category), cue words should be selected with a view to serving the further function of prompting recall. Perhaps the point should be made that some question formulations may call for both functions (e.g. '*fresh* fruits' or '*processed* fish products', supplemented by the appropriate range of cue words indicating the kinds of products, dishes or meal types at issue).

It would seem that strategies which might alleviate 'frequency problems' are those designed to reduce uncertainty and complexity. This might best be achieved by shortening the period of time under consideration, by reducing the complexity of the calculation at issue, or by pursuing both of these strategies at once. Observations made in the present study suggest that a 'funnel' technique of questioning might usefully be adopted in respect of foods associated with infrequent or highly variable intake. With a view to reducing complexity, this technique might take the form of starting with a relatively short reference period, then advancing to a longer one. Questioning would then take the form: *How often in the last week* (or month) *would you say that you had eaten ...*; followed by: *Would you say this was more often, less often, or about the same as you usually eat ...*; followed by: *So then how often would you say you usually eat...* Such a strategy would serve to reduce the complexity of the cognitive operations demanded of respondents, thereby improving the reliability of responses regarding the consumption of fish, fruit, potatoes and other vegetables.

Discussion

The quality of a FFQ is usually evaluated by means of quantitative tests regarding reproducibility and validity (*cf.* Fencanish *et al* 1993, Bohlschied-Thomas *et al* 1997, Ocké *et al* 1997, Pisani *et al* 1997, van Liere *et al* 1997, Männistö *et al* 1996). These tests identify frequency measures for which reproducibility and validity are satisfactory or unsatisfactory respectively, but they do not elucidate the reasons why particular measures yield these results. For this reason, attention has been drawn to the need for qualitative methods that can illuminate cognitive difficulties encountered by respondents, and which are likely to yield unreliable responses. One such method, termed 'cognitive interviewing', proceeds by requesting respondents to "think aloud" i.e. to verbalize their thoughts while considering

their responses (Jobe 1989). This method has been employed with a view to improving measures of food frequencies (Sobar *et al*. 1995). The present study, undertaken by an interdisciplinary team, sought an innovative approach to this issue by selecting focus groups as the method of data collection and by seeking to ground the analysis of data in a conceptual framework drawn from cognitive research.

It is our view that the use of focus groups has proved eminently suited to the task at hand. One advantage of a group, as compared to a personal interview, is that respondents are given the opportunity to develop and clarify their thoughts while being confronted with those of other participants (Morgan 1997). This feature proved fruitful in regard to elucidating patterns of recall among participants, in particular the manner in which recall was prompted by hearing one or another feature of the meal system mentioned in discussion. More importantly, the fact that discussion in two focus groups followed broadly similar lines suggests that some central issues could be identified on the basis of data collected in the present study. Ideally, however, data collection should have continued by recruiting further focus groups until all data proved to be repetitious and no new facets of the problems under investigation emerged. The present study was merely an explorative one, based upon the minimum number of focus groups that can fulfil the quality demands of a study of this kind. Nevertheless, the food groups that were identified as giving rise to the least and most pronounced cognitive difficulties respectively (e.g. rye bread on the one hand and fruit and fish on the other) are the same food groups for which relatively high and low levels of reproducibility have been identified by means of quantitative tests (*cf*. Haraldsdóttir *et al*. 1999, 2001). This convergence of results also supports the conclusion that central issues have been successfully identified in the present study.

Among the serious limitations of this study are that data have only been collected from men (aged 25 - 50 yrs) and do not include data from one-person households. Given differences between the dietary habits of men and women, as well as differences in their conceptions of food and health (O'Doherty Jensen & Holm 2000), it is clear that these data should be supplemented by focus groups comprising women. Given the findings of the present study in regard to the importance of the meal system in structuring dietary habits, it might be expected that members of one-person households encounter difficulties in responding to frequency questions that are different in character from those arising among

members of larger households. The same consideration applies to age groups. Suggestions made on the basis of the present study in regard to improving the frequency method should be supplemented therefore by further qualitative studies. Likewise, quantitative tests should be made of improvements in reproducibility in respect of revised questionnaires.

The strength of the conceptual framework employed in this analysis lies in its capacity to delineate the character of cognitive difficulties encountered by respondents. A distinction between 'basic', 'subordinate' and 'superordinate' food categories provided a basis upon which systematic patterns of cognitive difficulty could be identified: subordinate categories giving rise to problems of interpretation, superordinate categories to problems of recall. Moreover, it served to clarify the character and content of disparities of meaning between researchers and respondents, suggesting in turn specific strategies for alleviating these problems. Since these problems were identified in regard to half of all food frequency questions examined, this conceptual framework may well be regarded as yielding a key to understanding the cognitive difficulties of respondents. Furthermore, it may prove to be a useful tool in the development of food frequency questions. In the present study it was found that researchers had been unaware of their use of subordinate categories (e.g. 'cooked vegetables' as one kind among vegetables that are part of a hot meal) as well as their failure to use them (e.g. specifying explicitly that only *fresh* fruits were at issue). Researchers had been aware, implicitly at least, of problems likely to arise from their use of superordinate categories. However, it would seem that the latter categories pose a greater challenge to questionnaire design, in so far as their use, which may be unavoidable, presents respondents with difficulties of recall. Experts in the field of nutrition may tend to underestimate the difficulty of this challenge. Indeed the strategies suggested here as ways of alleviating these problems may well call for the services of an interdisciplinary team. Firstly, nutritionists and epidemiologists may too readily take for granted that a superordinate category such as 'fruit' or 'fish' refers to products that constitute 'one of a kind' in so far as they share common nutrients. Secondly, the provision of relevant cue words calls for detailed knowledge of the meal system among respondents. The findings of the present study, supported more generally by social research, confirm that a nutritional perspective is not the dominant one in the food practices of everyday life. For this reason, the task of improving the quality of the food frequency method would be advanced by interdisciplinary research undertaken by

nutritionists on the one hand and sociologists or anthropologists on the other.

Apart from practical applications of the conceptual framework employed in this study, the findings regarding prototypical exemplars of food categories and prototypical effects may be of intrinsic interest to sociologists and anthropologists engaged in food research and to consumer scientists in the field of food marketing as well as to nutritionists. The tendency among consumers to regard home-cooked food and meals as being superior to and more desirable than processed and mass-produced variants is well documented (Warde 1997). Likewise, tendencies to regard one kind of meal as being the "proper" kind or one kind of dish as constituting a "proper dinner" are documented (Murcott, 1982; Charles & Kerr, 1988). These tendencies are thought to be the product of cultural norms, the basis of which remains unclear. The pattern identified in the present study whereby prototypical exemplars of potato, vegetable, fruit and fish products all refer to fresh rather than processed variants of these products, and in each case is associated with healthy properties, suggests that research in this field would be advanced by further exploration of cognitive constraints upon the discernment of prototypical ('proper') exemplars of food categories. Finally, the results of the present study indicate that it would be highly desirable if studies of dietary habits were informed by systematic investigations of the meal structure that obtains within any given food culture. Such studies, of which there are too few at present, would enable nutritionists to take account of the factors that play a role in the classification of food products and food groups in everyday life.

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Gradient Blends: The Art of Discerning and Doing the Appropriate Thing[1]

K O'Doherty Jensen

Abstract

An appropriate or 'proper' option in everyday life according to the folk account is a matter of knowing just how far will not be going too far, and acting in a manner that is 'fitting', 'spot on' or 'hits the mark'. It is argued here, with reference to sociological studies of food culture and food practices, that discernments of appropriate consumption are blends, in which structure mapping regards the alignment of relations between grades of things (e.g. foods and beverages) and grades of feelings, resources, events or people as well as other beings. These meaning constructions are largely non-discursive, tend to remain implicit, and are communicated performatively and analogically by appropriate uses of consumer goods, as distinct from apt usage of language. The character of menus, meals and food preferences as constituted by 'gradient blends' enables us to understand both the coherence and mutability of any given food culture as well as the creativity of its construction. It would seem likely that this account might fruitfully be applied to other fields of human practice, including the production of ritual, art and non-verbal play. Meanwhile, blending theory presents a profound challenge to current sociological and anthropological accounts of consumer culture.

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It should be noted that due to an editorial mistake, the abstract did not appear in the original publication. Instead, the introductory paragraphs were subtitled 'abstract'. This mistake is rectified here.

Introduction

My area of research regards the sociology of food practices, and so I belong to a long line of sociologists and anthropologists who seek to explain patterns of human consumption. The major theories in this area are based on the assumption that explanation will regard a level of intelligibility that operates behind the backs of social actors. Functionalists have thus focussed on the influence of social structure, materialists on economic structure, and structuralists on symbolic structure. In this company the work of the anthropologist, Mary Douglas, has been somewhat deviant. Despite maintaining a clear focus on the relationship between symbolic and social structure, she has maintained a conviction that it must be possible to account for the cognitive 'underpinnings' of social practices. For this reason her work through several decades included attention to such issues as categorisation, rule following, implicit meaning and metaphorical cognition (Douglas, 1996, 1992, 1984, 1975, 1973). I share her concern to understand the role of human agency in the construction of food culture, and indeed this concern can no longer be regarded as deviant. The need to account for the relationship between agency, culture and 'structure' has been widely recognised in recent decades, in tune with what is now called the 'cultural turn' in social theory (Hall, 1997). I have become convinced that blending theory has an important contribution to make to understanding the character of agency. This paper explores a few aspects of that contribution with specific regard to a puzzling set of data.

The key issue concerns social actors' conceptions of any given practice as being appropriate or inappropriate. The data regard what people do and what they avoid doing, as observed or reported. Some data regard actors' descriptions of their preferences and expectations, how they perceive the preferences of others, how they react to deviations from expected practices, and the importance of doing something one way rather than another. But they do not include actors' own accounts of the meanings of these practices, these being rarely stated by those who perform them. The meaning, if any, thus tends to remain implicit, and in some instances actors deny that any particular meaning is at issue. One such case is analysed in the following on the working assumption that a blend underlies any such set of practices, and that it is

expressed in what people do rather than in anything they may have to say about the meaning of what is done.

The case material: gendered food preferences and practices

The selected case material concerns observations of gendered food practices. The practices of men and women differ in regard to the production of food and its preparation in the household, the division of labour being strongly gendered. Differences are less apparent in regard to consumption, with the exception of those societies in which gendered consumption is regulated by taboo. It nonetheless transpires from social research, dietary studies and epidemiological surveys, that food consumption in industrialised societies is also clearly gendered. The pattern most frequently identified concerns women's consumption of fruit and vegetables, as contrasted with men's consumption of meat (Bourdieu, 1984; Fiddes, 1991; Jansson, 1993; Fürst 1995; Lupton, 1996).

A review of several hundred empirical studies, which were undertaken in the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s in European countries, the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan, confirms that a wider range of foods are implicated in gendered patterns of consumption (O'Doherty Jensen & Holm, 1999). Women prefer and consume more fruit, vegetables, the white meats of poultry or fish, dairy products such as yoghurt and cottage cheese, and sweet products such as biscuits, chocolates and puddings. It is found that they prize salads, omelettes, soups, sandwiches and vegetarian dishes, and they regard any of these as dishes that can suitably comprise a main meal for their personal consumption. This pattern does not obtain among men. They on the other hand prefer and consume more alcohol, especially beer and the stronger spirits, all meat products, especially red meats, as well as potatoes. Studies undertaken in a number of countries reveal a distinct preference among men for main meals that comprise meat, gravy and potatoes. There is, however, one exception to these trends. Several studies indicate that men who have a higher education or a relatively higher income tend to have eating habits that resemble those of women rather more than those of other men (Murcott, 1983; Prättälä *et al*. 1992; Sweeting *et al*. 1994; Pederby, 1995).

Perhaps the most surprising finding to emerge from this review was that both

men and women in widely dispersed regions discern approximately similar foods and beverages as being 'feminine' or 'masculine', respectively. This conclusion does not immediately lend support to widely held assumptions of cultural relativism. But the pattern is clear, despite differences between the food cultures of these regions. Apart from data regarding consumption behaviour, it can be inferred from avoidance behaviour and sanctioning, and is also confirmed by verbal reports of preferences. In a study based on focus group interviews, it was found that participants were agreed as to which foods were 'masculine' and which 'feminine', but they were unable to agree upon the reasons why this might be so (Lupton, 1996).

These data thus represent one instance of a seminal problem in the linguistic, cognitive and social sciences: how are people able to abide by a set of rules without being able to offer any coherent account of what the rules are? In this instance, there is the further problem: can we account for the fact that such discernments are transcultural, or should we assume that all of the regions at issue share some common cultural traits? The specific question for analysis is this: given these data, can we account for discernments of gender-appropriate food preferences and practices in a systematic manner? Due to the character of the data, I have found it fruitful to introduce the concept of 'gradient blends', and to distinguish the mapping involved from the more familiar kinds of mapping in 'conceptual blends'. Something along these lines is intimated by Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 105), but not developed.

Gradient blends in the culinary domain

Images of spatial continua underlie folk descriptions and appraisals of appropriate and inappropriate social practices. Inappropriate options are described as ones that either commit the error of *going too far* or that of failing to *go far enough*. Some of these options are deemed *wide of the mark, way out* or *over the top*, while others fall disappointingly *below the mark.* An appropriate option on the other hand is described as *fitting.* It is based on a discernment of just *how far* is not going *too far* (Mayol, 1998:21), and it *hits the mark, the nail on the head,* is deemed *spot on*. I wish to introduce the idea that the discernment of gradient difference is intrinsic to the appraisal of non-discursive social practices and that double scope or multiple blends (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002) underlie discernments of these practices as being more

or less appropriate. ‘Non-discursive’ in this context refers to gradient meanings that are not verbalised and may or may not be conceptualised.

Gradient blends

A gradient difference refers to the characteristic of being ‘more or less’ as opposed to that of ‘either/or’, that is, the characteristic of varying in grade, degree, level or quantity as opposed to that of kind. It is here proposed that gradient differences are discerned in everyday life in respect of levels of affect, kinaesthetic feelings and motor movements, the contents of percepts or images, as well as entities that are categorised and named. Perhaps the main application of this term in cognitive semantics refers to the internal structure of a graded category, according to which degrees of membership are differentiated (Lakoff, 1987). Michaelis (1996:216) identifies a ‘scale’ as underlying a particular kind of graded category, within which entities are ranked and relegated to subclasses according to the degree to which they manifest a given property. The latter usage lies close to that employed here in so far as it will be argued that the social practices under consideration are based upon implicit rankings of entities.

A gradient perspective is imposed upon any set of categorised entities by ranking them according to one or another criterion. Just as anger can be more or less intensely felt, a movement felt or perceived to be more or less swift, a sound heard or recollected as being more or less loud, so variants of a thing or different things can be deemed to be more or less desirable, events to be more or less important, people to have more or less status or income, etc. Accordingly, the inputs to a gradient blend may comprise feelings, percepts or images, whether or not these phenomena are conceptualised, as well as entities that are categorised and named. The gradient blends under consideration here have inputs of the latter kind. These inputs have a conceptual structure that regards one or more entities as distributed on a continuum or ‘scale’, the endpoints of which are identified by means of binary categories. For example, if events can be either ‘important’ or ‘unimportant’, the discernment of just how important any particular event is deemed to be will regard the issue of precisely where on a continuum of levels of importance-unimportance that particular event *fits in*. The discernment of the gradient meaning of that event thus regards its location within the

'space' between binary categories.

Although it is clear that discernments of grade are expressed verbally by such means as the uses of adverbs, subcategories or repetition, it is not clear to me to what extent the 'points' or 'intervals' on gradient continua, or relations between them, are usually identified by means of language. As a non-linguist, my impression is that this is not the case, quite specific domains of discourse such as those of economic exchange or musical notation – each of which is based upon the construction and social recognition of an analogical medium of communication – being exceptions to the rule. I am in no doubt, however, that non-discursive social practices can and do express any of the finer distinctions of such gradient discernment, for example by means of the relative loudness of clapping that contributes to a given level of applause, the precise depth of an acknowledging bow, the grade of foods and drinks that constitute a given menu or the degree of formality with which it is appropriately consumed.

The distinguishing feature of gradient blends regards the character of the mapping between inputs (see Fig. 1). In contrast to conceptual blends, it is not conceptual structure that is mapped from one input to another. Rather, it would seem that all gradient blends have the same generic structure in which the alignment between inputs regards relations between grades, as distributed on at least two continua (*cf.* Sweetser, 2000:322). What is mapped from one input to the other is the relative position of an entity or entities on one continuum to the relative position of one or more entities on another continuum. The following analysis seeks to demonstrate that gradient blends underlie discernments of which kinds of food are appropriately consumed when and by whom. Since the latter discernment rests upon the composition of a given cuisine, the question of which foods appropriately belong to which occasions is considered first.

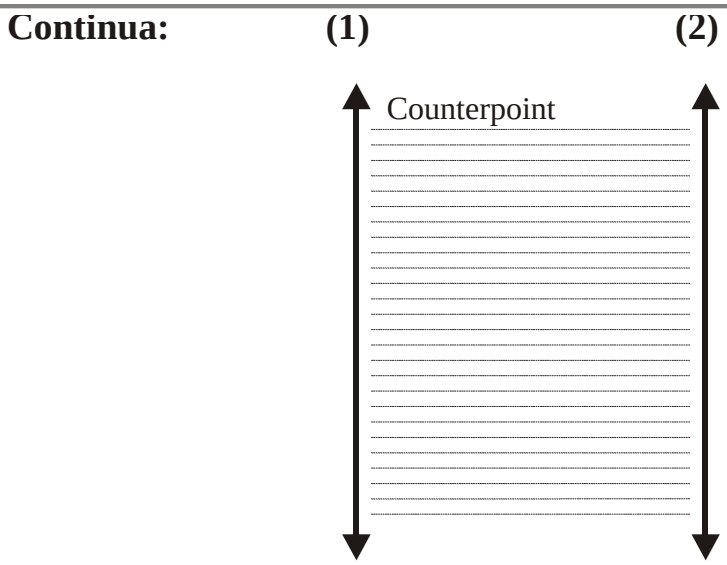

Fig. 1: The generic form of related continua in gradient blends

Grades of events are grades of foods

One of the many symbolic functions attributed to food is that of distinguishing recurring cycles of events: morning, midday and evening are distinguished from each other, workdays from weekends, the weekly cycle from annual occasions such as birthdays as well as once-in-a-lifetime occasions (Douglas, 1975; Sellerberg, 1978). The 'meal' is the social construction that functions as a marker of these events in so far as it concerns rule-bound combinations and sequences of items to be consumed. It will be readily agreed that the cognitive underpinnings of this accomplishment regard the mapping of kinds of food and kinds of event on to each other. Thus for Americans a roast turkey signifies Thanksgiving. Where I come from, however, the same entity signifies Christmas. But the purpose of the present analysis is not to trace any of the vast number of such conceptual mappings that tend to be specific to a given culture, although we now have excellent examples of how this might be done (Turner, 2001). From the point of view of their gradient aspects, what is noteworthy about these mappings is the fact that the same entity is a marker of a more important occasion in both social settings. In order to simplify the following analysis of gradient as distinct from categorial meanings of food, only the relatively widespread and familiar three-meal system, comprising the daily cycle of 'breakfast', 'lunch' and 'dinner', will be briefly considered.

Different degrees of importance are commonly attributed to the three eating

events of the daily cycle, least to the first meal of the day and most to the evening meal. The concept of a 'meal' is itself constituted by a multiple blend. While this cannot be explored here, it should be said that the relative importance of these three events can be inferred from a variety of social practices, each of which concerns gradient variables. Among these are: the uses of household resources of time, labour and/or money, the complexity of dishes served, the formality with which they are consumed, the duration and location of the event and the numbers of participants. The hypothesis that a gradient blend is at issue in the discernment of which combinations of food and beverage appropriately belong to each of these events, rests on the further supposition that kinds of food and beverage are also graded. When I began to look for data that could elucidate the ways in which consumers rank order foods and beverages, I was surprised to discover that food groups are ranked in a manner that is transcultural (O'Doherty Jensen *et al*. 2001).

Sociologists of food have long been familiar with the view that hierarchically ordered norms obtain in Western food cultures, according to which animal products are most highly prized, red meats being prized above white meats, followed by other animal products such as eggs and dairy produce. These are followed by fruit, leaf vegetables and root vegetables in that order, while cereal products occupy a place at the bottom of the culinary scale (Twigg, 1984). However, economists' analyses of aggregated data, regarding the successive phases of consumer demand that have followed upon rising standards of living during the past 50 years, reveal that this same pattern has obtained in all parts of the globe (Grigg, 1999). Demand patterns do indicate dramatic geographical differences in levels of consumption of animal products (especially the flesh of animals, poultry or fish) as well as cereals, but not exceptions to the pattern whereby animal foods are ranked above vegetable foods and both are ranked higher than cereal foods. Moreover, historical data (Grieco, 1996) lend weight to the view that what is at issue is a global pattern that is far from being a recent phenomenon. While it would be tempting to speculate about why we consumers rank order foods in this way, for the present purpose it suffices to ascertain that we do so in a similar manner. On this basis, the mapping of grades of food and grades of events on to each other can be illustrated by means of a single gradient blend (see Fig. 2).

A few familiar cross-cultural patterns can illustrate the claim that grades of food and grades of events are mapped on to each other in the conventional food practices of industrialised societies. Firstly, the foods deemed appropriate to the least important meal of the day are those to which least culinary status is attributed. These are cereal products, which also lend their names to a wide variety of breakfast dishes. Secondly, cereal products (bread, pasta) are commonly retained in the meal that occupies a mid-point on the scale of importance, and they are accompanied by any of a range of products drawn from the middle or upper ranges of the culinary scale. It is the latter that constitute the centrepiece of these dishes, and frequently confer their names upon them as their distinguishing feature (beans on toast, tuna on rye, ham sandwich, etc.). Thirdly, while cereal products are retained in secondary courses (if any) of the most important meal of the day, they are commonly omitted in its main course. The practice of using potatoes as the staple ingredient of that course has been widespread during the last couple of centuries (a pattern that may be changing again). The accompanying product, vegetables, is also drawn from the middle range of the culinary scale. Neither root nor leaf vegetables confer their names on these dishes, the foods that constitute their centrepiece being traditionally drawn from the highest range of the culinary scale. These are meat products, the relative importance of which is underscored by the fact that meat always confers its name upon any dish in which it constitutes an ingredient (Rosenberg, 1990).

While all meals include products from at least two of these food grou ps, the variants of any given meal are rendered superior by including products located at higher ‘points’ of the culinary scale, and inferior by including lower status items. Thus, a breakfast may be rendered superior by the inclusion of such items as fruit, cheese, eggs or bacon, while a lunch is rendered superior by including meat and excluding cereal products – that is, more closely resembling a variant of dinner (lamb chops and potato salad, etc.). A dinner on the other hand is rendered inferior by including inferior meat products (sausages, sliced bacon, etc.), but more so by excluding meat altogether. In British cuisine it has been shown that the meal thereby

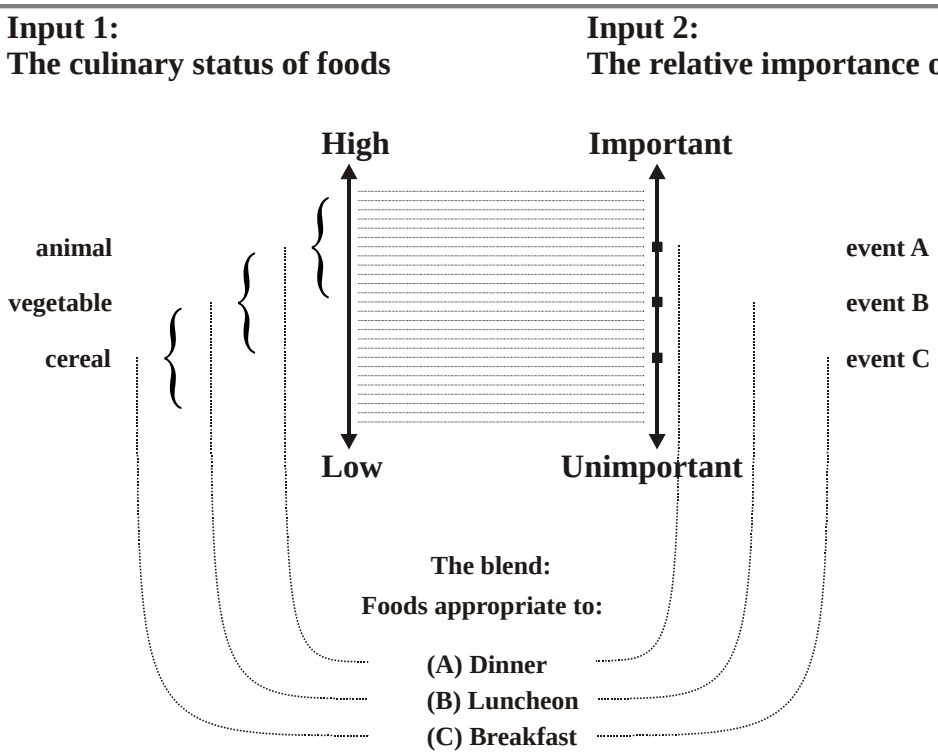

Fig. 2: Meals distinguished by means of a gradient blend: Grades of events are grades of foods

ceases to be regarded as an exemplar of a 'proper' dinner (Murcott, 1982), the same function being played by potatoes (Douglas & Nicod, 1974). Finally, while grades of beverage are poorly illuminated by social research, it is clear that alcohol is one of the usual markers of relatively more important occasions (Charles & Kerr, 1988). So much so that a festive occasion without alcohol might be widely deemed to fall *below the mark*. Perhaps the modern conception that it is not *fitting* to consume alcohol too early in the day reflects an inverse inference to the effect that this is not the time-span of the daily cycle to which superior beverages appropriately belong. On the basis of these systematic patterns, I submit that discernments of which kinds of food appropriately belong to which kinds of event are undertaken in non-arbitrary ways by means of a gradient blend.

Grades of foods are grades of people

It is now possible to identify the non-arbitrary and systematic character of discernments of foods and beverages as being gender-appropriate or otherwise. The supposition that will not be examined here, but which is thoroughly documented by social research, is that according to any of a wide range of criteria more social status is

commonly attributed to men than to women. In so far as gendered food preferences are the product of a gradient blend, we might then expect to find a pattern whereby grades of culinary and social status are mapped on to each other. This is precisely the pattern that is documented by empirical social research with regard to gendered food practices. In each case, the foods that both men and women deem appropriate to men occupy a point on the culinary scale that is, so to speak, one step higher up than those deemed appropriate to women. This pattern regards: the composition of main meals as contrasted with secondary meals (sandwiches), the main course of that meal as contrasted with secondary courses (soup, fish, pudding/dessert), the centrepiece of the main course as contrasted with its trimmings or side dishes (vegetables, salad), meat products in general as contrasted with other animal products (eggs, dairy produce), red meats as contrasted with white meats (poultry), and alcoholic as contrasted with non-alcoholic beverages.

On this basis we may wish to claim that ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ foods function as graded categories in much the same way as ‘breakfast’, ‘lunch’ and ‘dinner’. A fuller exploration of this issue, which cannot be undertaken here, would call for consideration of the boundaries of those categories, expressed for example in such concepts as those of a ‘proper dinner’, a ‘proper meal’ (*cf*. Murcott, 1982; Charles & Kerr, 1988) or the hybrid concept of ‘brunch’. For the present purpose it must suffice to note that the former set of categories, in contrast to the latter, are not explicit categories of discourse. We cannot and do not walk into a supermarket as we would into a department store asking for the ladies’ or men’s department. Discernments of ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ foods and menus serve to guide appropriate practices in other ways than by the apt use of language. Nevertheless, given the human propensity to blend, food preferences are easily discerned as being gender-appropriate or otherwise so long as two conditions are fulfilled: products, dishes, courses and meals are ranked within a given cuisine and differential status is accorded to men and women within a given society. Furthermore, any such discernments are likely to be reinforced and confirmed by observing patterns of behaviour that rest upon similar discernments made by other people. In so far as such behaviour grounds expectations of the manner in which the incumbents of given status positions should behave it will be constrained by social norms. However, while it is

clear from social research that such norms are operative, it is equally clear that people generally find it difficult to account for their discernment of appropriate practices and specific options in verbal terms. It would seem likely that the main reason for this is due to the non-discursive character of the mapping operation in gradient blends.

The mapping operation in a gradient blend is analogical. The grade of one or more entities on a given continuum functions as an analogue of the grade of one or more entities with which it is compared. For this reason, expressions of gradient meaning call for the use of an analogical medium of communication, just as interpretations of gradient meanings are interpretations of analogical display. Among such media are the human body and the social uses of goods. It follows that the analogues at issue in human communication of gradient meanings are biologically grounded and/or products of human insight. As such, they will be subject to more or less voluntary control and be constrained to a greater or lesser extent by social norms. There are therefore a number of reasons why a gradient blend, as performed, may be relatively easily understood from one culture to another. Among these are: the non-discursive character of the mapping operation, the non-discursive character of its medium of expression, and the non-cultural or transcultural character of its inputs (if either of these latter conditions are fulfilled). For example, most rituals of greeting incorporate analogue displays of the level of friendliness-unfriendliness at issue as well as each of the interactant's discernments of their social status relative to each other. The width of a smile, the relative physical distance between interactants, the occurrence, duration and formality-informality of touching or speech, and the ascription of initiative to one or both parties, are relatively stable inputs to such rituals from one culture to another. Similarly, the relative stability of inputs underlies the transcultural character of the blend whereby grades of food and grades of people are mapped on to each other.

The stability and persistence of a gradient blend are dependent on the stability of the rankings that constitute its inputs. Those at issue in the present case have by no means remained unchallenged. The widespread conception of women as second-class citizens relative to men on a gradient scale of human beings has been severely challenged, not least since the 1960s, with some success it would seem among women and among men who have higher levels of education (Lorber, 1994). Similarly,

dietary recommendations have in effect challenged the culinary status attributed to specific foods, with some success in regard to the relative ranking of such items as red meats and fish, as well as eggs, for example. In this light, the pattern whereby more highly educated men tend to exhibit 'feminine' food preferences might be attributed to the fact that these men are relatively more informed about expert opinion in the area of nutrition, as compared to other men. But this factor cannot reasonably be regarded as that which underlies women's food preferences in general. The deviant pattern among well-educated men might therefore equally well be attributed to the fact that they are less likely than other men to maintain a conception of the difference between men and women as being gradient in character. In that event, the need to maintain a correspondingly *fitting* gradient distinction in respect to their food preferences would be less salient for this group of men as compared to other men.

The contribution of blending theory to understanding agency

No attempt has been made here to outline the many factors that exert influence upon food preferences or practices. In the light of case material regarding gendered habits of consumption, it is nevertheless possible to sketch the contribution of blending theory to social theory with particular regard to the character of agency.

On functionalist premises, we would be required to claim that actors discern a given practice as being appropriate or otherwise in so far as they have internalised available norms (i.e. rules of behaviour, expressed in interaction as expectations directed to the incumbent of a given status position). The actor is thus conceived as acting in a voluntary but not a creative manner with respect to given norms (*cf.* Joas, 1996). Norms vary from one society to another. Their specific contents are thought to be arbitrary, while their functions (largely unintended consequences) for the maintenance of a given social structure are not. This view of the relationships between actors, practices and the normative aspects of social structure has been criticized on many counts, of which central criticisms are that it cannot account for processes of social and cultural change, it presupposes cultural integration and cannot account for conflict, and it tends to treat structural factors as causal and cultural phenomena as epiphenomena of social structure.

The former points of criticism have also been levelled at structuralist accounts

with the difference that the symbolic structure of cultural phenomena is at issue, while the actor's contribution to the generation or maintenance of such structure remains unexplained. The point that so irritated Mary Douglas was that a focus upon symbolic structure yields such relatively poor insight into the character of agency, it being merely assumed that unconscious mechanisms must render the actor a bearer of such structures.

The ambitions of these older 'grand' theories have been largely abandoned in recent years in favour of 'thick description' of practices, situated analyses of norm negotiation, and a widespread commitment to the view that both social and cultural phenomena are constructed by social actors. These approaches attribute central importance to human agency, and have been fruitfully employed in the analysis of concrete social phenomena. But they do not offer a perspective from which we might begin to explain why men and women in vastly different situations should exhibit similar preferences and practices or negotiate similar norms, much less why they should do so without being able to account for what they are at.

Given the unresolved issues of social theory, the available interpretations and explanations of gendered food practices are less than satisfying. Most of the available accounts are *ad hoc* interpretations of data collected from local populations. Some few theorists have noted the transcultural character of preferences and have put forward an unexamined suggestion to the effect that metaphor is implicated in the relationship between vegetables and femininity on the one hand, and meat and masculinity on the other (Lupton, 1996; Füerst, 1995). The mainstream account, however, rests on the premises of older schools of thought, conceiving preferences and practices as epiphenomena of social structure.

According to that account, symbolic significance is attributed to foods in so far as foods are accorded the same status as their consumers (Barthes, 1975; Bourdieu, 1984; Charles & Kerr, 1988; Pederby, 1995). For this reason, it is claimed, men do not consume the kinds of products preferred by women or children since such practices would undermine the maintenance of their superior status. The observation as such may well be valid as applied to a majority of men, but the supposition that social stratification is the causal factor behind preferences, practices and the attribution of symbolic significance to foods, does not follow from that observation. In accordance

with functionalist premises, this account helps us to understand how given patterns of preference are maintained and how a given set of norms can serve to reproduce gendered status positions. It does not help us to understand how any specific set of preferences or norms are generated, nor why they might change. It also fails to account for why men at the top of the social scale are not exemplars of 'masculine' food preferences, but constitute instead a deviant case.

Several dilemmas are resolved by seeking to account for these puzzling data from the vantage point of blending theory. First, if social actors are conceived as cognitively creative human beings who possess the capacity to blend inputs, we are enabled to account for the manner in which gendered preferences, and their tacit meanings, are generated. As such, this does not provide us with an account of the ways in which any particular blend may become institutionalised and thereby subject to normative constraints. But it does imply that the generation and maintenance of any given norms rest upon actors' discernments, the significant point in this context being that such discernments are not undertaken in an arbitrary manner. This in turn yields the possibility of accounting for how and why any given norms might change. Second, it becomes clear that social structure is by no means unrelated to the cognitive accomplishments of social actors. From the actor's perspective, any given aspects of structure (status positions, norms, roles and social institutions) constitute inputs to – rather than causes of – discernments made. Third, while the ability to discern who ranks above and below whom is among the preconditions of maintaining any system of social stratification, this does not render the actor a master builder of that system. We are enabled to pursue constructionist premises without assuming that the contents of a given input or blend in the mind of the actor and the structure of collective actions are isomorphic. By the same token, we are enabled to review the findings of structuralist analyses without positing more in respect of agency than the actor's ability to blend (*cf.* Sweetser, 2000: 319).

Although the actor's involvement in social construction is not undertaken from the perspective of a master builder, it emerges that the minutiae of expectations in everyday life are nonetheless far from being arbitrary. There are indeed reasons why we expect to find male waiters in a restaurant purporting to offer *haute cuisine*, waitresses in a coffee shop, our host carving the joint of meat and serving the drinks,

our hostess cutting the cake and pouring tea. We may not be able to say what those reasons are. If asked, we are likely to refer to tradition. Some people treat meat in the manner of vegetables, chopping both into small pieces to make a sauce, others do not, and we may not pause to wonder how often this occurs in egalitarian households as compared to other households. If the genesis of preferences and norms cannot be accounted for, there is no more to be said. But blending theory does offer the conceptual tools whereby the blends that underlie such non-arbitrary patterns can be unpacked and their implicit meanings made explicit.

This view of the matter allows us to analyse food culture on the assumption that any given cuisine constitutes a relatively coherent domain of largely non-discursive practices in which kinds and grades of goods, events, activities and people are mapped on to each other. The present analysis suffers from the limitation that conceptual mappings in the field of food practices have not been included, although they could fruitfully be explored in regard to food taboos as well as a range of other matters. Only two examples of gradient blends have been briefly presented. If, as I have tried to demonstrate, grades of food are grades of events and grades of people, as expressed in our food practices, it may be of benefit to introduce the notion of 'performative metaphor' to our analyses of non-discursive meaning constructions. The term refers to mappings that are expressed by means of what we do, the tacit meaning of which may not be discursively available. Such mappings it must be presumed are expressed in a very wide field of cultural practices from the finer arts to the more mundane matters of everyday life. This perspective opens up a new field of investigation to sociologists. It also suggests the need for blending theorists to give more consideration to the ways in which human beings construct and communicate meanings that are not expressed by means of language.

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Accounting for the Implicit Meaning of a Cultural Convention: The 'Proper Dinner' Revisited from the Vantage Point of Blending Theory[1]

K O'Doherty Jensen

The theory of 'conceptual integration' or 'conceptual blending', commonly referred to as *blending*, offers a new vantage point from which to conceptualise a range of familiar problems in cultural and social theory. These include such central issues as how to interpret implicit meanings of cultural conventions and how to account for the cognitive underpinnings of symbolic, cultural and social structures. The theory is conceived as a contribution to cognitive science, regards processes of meaning construction and serves to illuminate the creative character of human agency. It has been developed in the course of the last decade by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner (Turner & Fauconnier 1995; Fauconnier & Turner 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002) and is still in the process of dynamic development. Initial applications of this theory have largely been within the field of linguistics, with particular regard to cognitive semantics. However, a number of applications are now being made in other fields (*cf.* Hougaard & Lund (eds.) 2002), including some few forays into that of social and cultural theory (Sweetzer 2000; Sørensen 2000; Turner 2001; Hutchins 2002; O'Doherty Jensen 2002). My present objective is to introduce this theory to a wider group of social scientists by illustrating its potential contribution to social and cultural analysis. This task will be undertaken in three steps.

First, I will introduce some few aspects of *blending* theory, focussing on the character of 'cross-space mapping' in processes of meaning construction. Second, I will present empirical data regarding a particular cultural convention, drawn from my own field of research: the sociology and anthropology of consumption with particular reference to food practices. While this field abounds with empirical studies of conventions, the selected case material regards a particularly well documented ritual: the 'proper dinner' as a feature of everyday life in Great Britain. It comprises three empirical investigations carried out over a period of fifteen years (Douglas & Nicod

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[1] To be submitted for publication in abbreviated and amended form.

1974; Murcott 1982, Charles and Kerr 1988). The empirical results of these investigations were largely convergent and helped to supplement each other. Their results pose a challenge, nevertheless, for the reason that each successive investigator offered a different account of the meaning of this convention and its implicit symbolic significance. The third and final step will be to meet this challenge by grounding one interpretation of the meaning of this convention, and this task will be undertaken within the analytical framework yielded by *blending* theory. My objective can be deemed to be reached in so far as the reader's assessment of this analysis is that an account of the meaning of this convention when informed by *blending* theory yields a more adequate and satisfactory account of the available empirical data than those yielded by earlier studies.

Blending theory

The theory of *blending* draws on Fauconnier's earlier development of 'mental space theory' (Fauconnier 1994 [1985], 1997) and Turner's development of 'conceptual metaphor theory', originally launched by Lakoff and Johnson (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, Lakoff, 1987; Lakoff & Turner 1989; Turner 1987, 1991, 1996). These earlier theories had shared the idea that an account of human meanings as expressed in language calls for the development of a cognitive theory, as opposed to applications of the tools of formal logic. They were hailed as major advances in the study of reference, description and co-reference (mental space theory) and categorization, metaphor and metonymy (conceptual metaphor theory), respectively. *Blending*, however, quickly became a more ambitious theoretical enterprise, claiming to account for the manner in which human meanings are constructed in the realms of mathematics, science, technology, art, religion and culture more generally, including language (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). That is to say, *blending* theory has not been developed with a view to resolving discrete, substantive disciplinary problems as such. It accounts for the character of 'conceptual blending', thought to be the cognitive operation that yields diverse accomplishments of a specifically human kind.

In seeking to account for creative aspects of the human mind and its innovative cultural products, this theory in effect challenges one of the central tenets of cognitive and neurosciences to-day: the idea that mind is best understood in so far as it resembles a computer. As such, *blending* theorists might be said to constitute a deviant school of thought among contemporary cognitive scientists.

Given its theoretical antecedents, most of the available analyses of conceptual blending regard linguistic data, and blending is often referred to in these contexts as being a particular kind of meaning construction in the mind of a speaker or listener. This convention is initially followed here. However, since this theory will later be used to analyse the meaning of non-verbal social practices, reference will more frequently be made to meaning constructions as being in the minds of social actors. The following outline distinguishes two kinds of meaning, respectively termed 'categorial' and 'gradient', as well as the mapping operations associated with their construction.

A 'blend' is constructed within a 'conceptual integration network' and it constitutes one of at least four 'mental spaces' that comprise any such network (see Fig. 1). As the term suggests, the operation of conceptual blending is one that combines conceptual contents drawn from more than one source. The latter are termed 'input' spaces, so called because their function is that of contributing conceptual structure to the blend, in which they are not only combined but often further developed. The fourth mental space is termed 'generic', so called because it contains structure that is common to the input spaces. *Blending* theory presents models of these networks, distinguishes different kinds, and accounts for their operation according to a set of structural and dynamic principles (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Some structural aspects of one such network - a 'single-scope' network - are exemplified here, paying attention to the manner in which input spaces are related to each other by

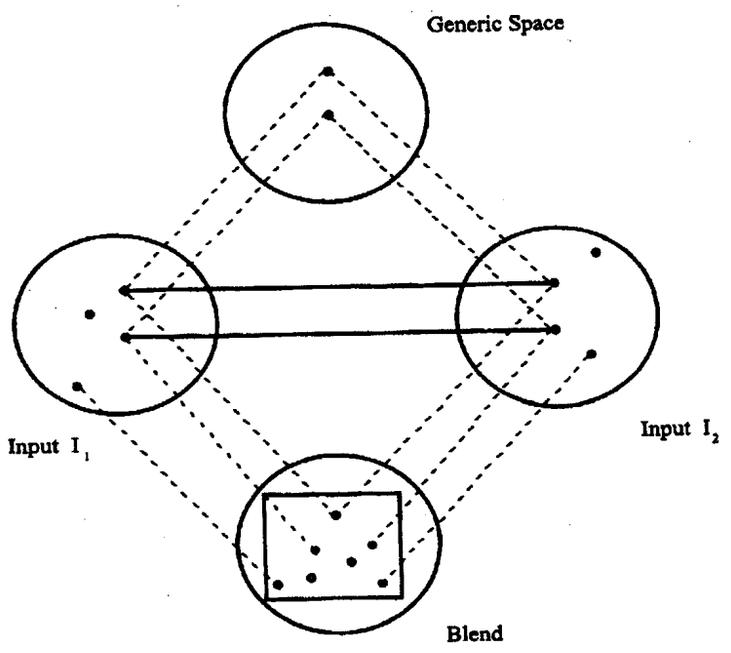

Fig. 1: Mapping between elements in a conceptual network (Fauconnier & Turner 2002:45-50)

means of discerning connections between the elements in each space[2]. This process, by which one or more elements in each input space are discerned as counterparts of each other, is termed 'cross-space mapping'.

Any particular thought or image that presents itself to the mind during an on-going process of meaning construction is said to occupy a 'mental space'. Its contents constitute a short-term and partial construct and may contain one or more elements regarding the particular scenario under consideration. Any given scenario is also likely to be structured by more long-term and complex domains of knowledge, often available to actors within a given culture in the schematic form of 'frames' (Goffman 1986 [1974]). Let us suppose a situation in which a lecturer is advising a graduate student with regard to the progress of her thesis. The general character of this situation

[2] There is a disparity between the reference to a 'single-scope' network in the present paper and that made to 'double-scope' blends/networks in the previous paper - a point that calls for further consideration and elucidation.

is familiar to both interactants, being defined beforehand by a number of common frames pertaining to academic life, including what it means to write 'a thesis', to give or seek 'guidance', to be a 'lecturer' or 'graduate student', etc. The situation is also structured by the specific long-term knowledge of each interactant, including such aspects as their relative expertise within an academic discipline and the personal view each has formed of the other person. In the given situation, the lecturer remarks, "Your argument would be a lot more clear if you got rid of all that garnish." The point of this remark is not difficult to grasp, and we can assume that this might be accomplished with ease. For the present purpose we should note that it includes reference to more than one domain of prior knowledge, the clarity of an 'argument' referring to the domain of academic life and 'garnish', used metaphorically, to the domain of food. The expression and understanding of meaning in each case rests on the combination of these elements by means of a blend.

The conceptual network operating in the case of the lecturer's remark, and potentially in the student's understanding of it, can be described as follows (see Fig. 2). One mental space, constituting an input to the network, regards the character of the student's argument. The elements in this space juxtapose the notion of an unclear argument, taken by the speaker to be a matter of fact, and the counterfactual notion of a clear argument. A process of change whereby the former can be made more clear is envisaged. Another mental space, constituting a different input, regards the notion of a garnished dish and an action whereby it can be turned into an ungarnished one. The blended space is one in which an action performed on the dish (getting rid of all that garnish) suggests the kind of action that should be undertaken in respect of the argument (inferentially, getting rid of unnecessary embellishments that obscure its main points). A network of this kind is called 'single-scope' precisely for the reason that only one of its inputs, in this case the dish and its garnish, provide the organizing structure for the conceptual contents of the blended space (Fauconnier & Turner 2002:126-135).

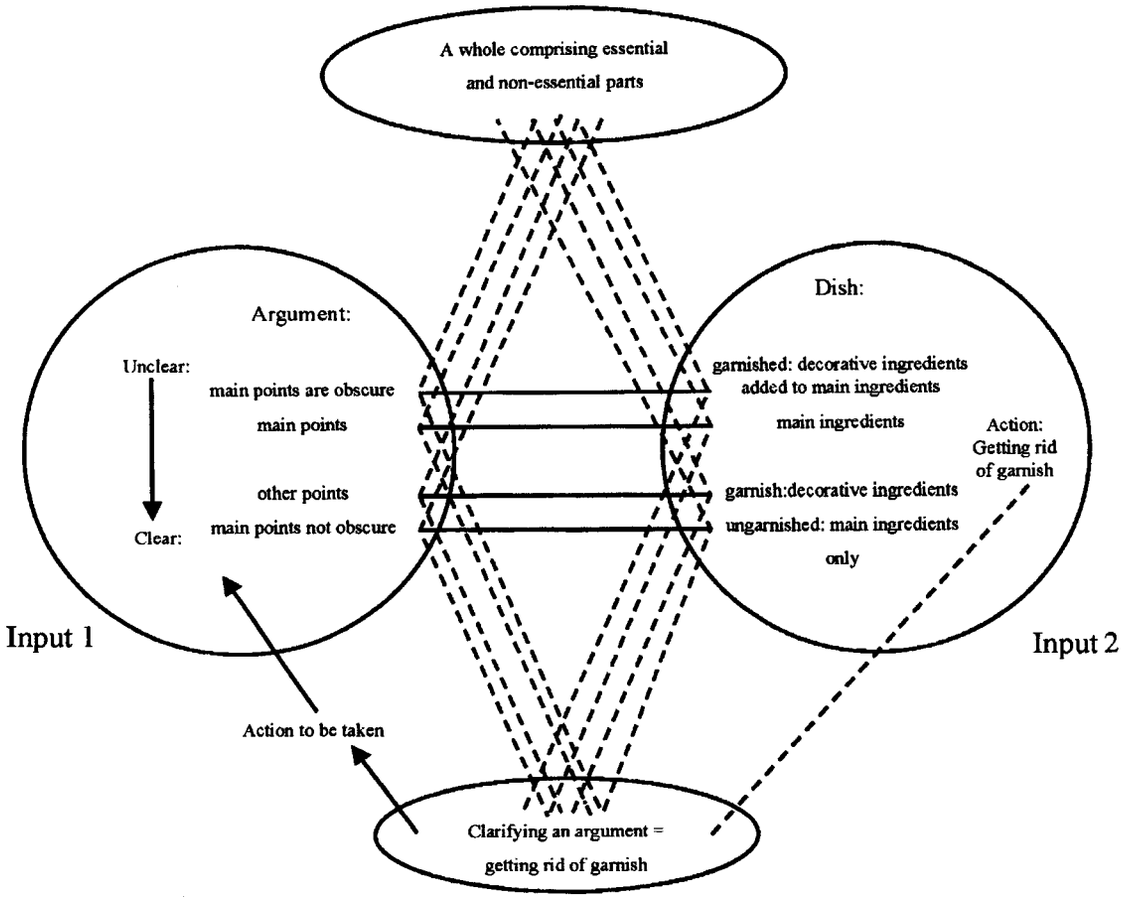

Fig. 2: Cross-space mapping of elements of conceptual structure in a 'categorial' blend

A blend of this kind only makes sense to a speaker or listener in so far as the elements in each input are brought into correspondence with each other by means of cross-space mapping. That is to say, one or more of the elements in one input are taken to be counterparts of one or more of the elements in the other input. In this case, the main points of an argument correspond to the main ingredients of a dish. The non-essential points of an argument correspond to those non-essential ingredients of a dish that serve a merely decorative function. An unclear argument corresponds to a dish in which the main ingredients are obscured by decorative garnish. At a more abstract level, the generic mental space operating in this network regards the notion of a whole comprising parts, of which some are essential and others not. The counterpart elements in each input are projected to the blended space, in which it makes perfect sense - given these counterpoint connections - that an action performed on an item in

one input corresponds to an action performed on an otherwise dissimilar item in a different input, thus yielding an inference regarding the appropriate action to be taken.

The somewhat time-consuming process of accounting for the character of a conceptual network (and what has been offered here is a very partial account of its structure) may obscure the fact that networks of this kind operate dynamically and are constructed quite effortlessly from moment to moment in the course of expressing one's meaning or interpreting that of another person. The metaphorical use of 'garnish' in this instance may very well spring to mind for the reason that ideas, arguments and academic work more generally, are frequently conceptualised and expressed in terms drawn from the domain of food. After all, ideas also 'crop up', are 'cultivated' and 'planted' in the minds of students. They 'take root', 'grow', belong to 'branches' or 'fields', and prove to be more or less 'fruitful'. We 'boil down' arguments, 'add spice' to them and 'serve' them up, occasionally fearing that we are 'spoon feeding' our students. They 'devour', 'swallow' or try to 'digest' our best notions, sometimes 'biting off more than they can chew'. At worst, we or they are forced to 'eat our words', but a good lecture, like any kind of good meal, 'goes down' well. Otherwise, it is merely 'garbage' (*cf.* Deignan 1995). What is at issue here is not a series of unrelated figurative clichés, but different expressions of a single 'conceptual metaphor' that has become an entrenched feature of conventional language, that conception being: 'Ideas are Foods' (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:46-47). This insight provides some of the relevant cultural context for understanding the selection of relevant frames during an on-going process of meaning construction in an academic setting.

The interpretation of a blend is referred to as the process of 'unpacking' it, that is, discerning underlying counterpoint connections that are deemed relevant in a specific context (Fauconnier & Turner 2002; *cf.* Brandt & Brandt, forthcoming). An appropriate response from the student who had grasped the point of this remark might be to inquire about which parts of the argument, in the view of the lecturer, should be omitted. Once having unpacked the blend, however, the student might also opt to play

along within its terms - the process called 'running the blend' - and say, "OK. Well, take my conclusion at the top of page 9. Now where exactly on the preceding pages would you identify all those lettuce leaves and parsley?" In either case, the point would have been grasped by discerning counterpoint connections between the elements of two input spaces and projecting them to a blended space. This linking process is non-arbitrary and highly selective. Its non-arbitrary character arises from relations of similarity, analogy, identity or other connections between counterpoint elements in any mapping operations (Fauconnier & Turner 2002). Its selective character arises from dynamic processes of insight and abstraction, whereby some elements in input and blended spaces map onto each other while others are deemed irrelevant to the task at hand. For example, it matters not a whit whether 'the dish' at issue in the input space in this instance is hot or cold, nor what its main ingredients might be.

This example focusses upon cross-space mapping between input spaces, in which elements of conceptual structure are aligned with each other in non-arbitrary ways and identified as counterparts. A somewhat different kind of mapping between input spaces is found in constructions that primarily express 'gradient', as compared with 'categorial' meanings (O'Doherty Jensen 2002). Gradient meanings concern phenomena that vary in the manner of being more so/less so. That is, they vary in grade, degree, intensity level, quantity. The phenomena at issue may be affects, images, actions, categories or category members that differ in their gradient characteristics. For example, one hug or one level of applause, differs from another, varying as they do in levels of intensity and duration, as well as degree of proximity, loudness or other gradient characteristics. These gradient differences are experienced as meaningful by social actors. To take an example in which categories are at issue, one 'birthday party' may be more important than another, calling for a degree of formality, a grade of dress and menu, and perhaps gifts at a given level of expense, that should be appropriate to (that is, correspond with) the relative importance of the particular occasion. Once again, social actors discern these ways of expressing just

how important a given event is as meaningful. Categorial meanings on the other hand refer to phenomena that vary qualitatively in kind in the manner of being either/or: Did he give you a hug or a smile? Is it a birthday party, a graduation party, or something else quite different? Precisely the same distinction is made in the course of social research when we distinguish 'continuous' ('measured' or 'gradient') from 'discontinuous' ('discrete' or 'categorial') variables, recognising in the former case that not all measurements are designed to classify respondents as belonging to one or another of a set of mutually exclusive categories. Indeed, many of our decisions regarding design and analysis concern whether and when continuous variables should be converted to discontinuous ones and vice versa. Much the same operations are performed in the cognitive activities of everyday life, it is claimed here, and are frequently expressed in everyday language. For example, what kinds or levels of variance render an 'opera' an 'operetta', a 'dinner' a 'dinner party', or for that matter no longer a 'proper dinner' at all? Clearly, many linguistic categories, not least sub-categories, do rest on discernments of gradient differences. This is particularly clear with respect to the discernment of a 'prototype', in which one category member is discerned as being the 'proper' or prototypical kind while others fail to exhibit all the characteristics of the prototype (Lakoff, 1987). Since constructions and expressions of meanings that are primarily gradient in character are integral features of non-verbal expressive media, the structure of blends based on gradient cross-space mapping is outlined here.

Cross-space mapping in the case of gradient blends does not take the form illustrated in the previous example, in which elements of conceptual structure in each of two inputs spaces are aligned with each other. Instead, all gradient blends have the same generic form in which the alignment of inputs regards relations between grades, as distributed on two or more continua. The end-points of such continua are sometimes identified by means of binary categories referring to opposite poles (important/unimportant, formal/informal, etc.), and in that case a discernment of

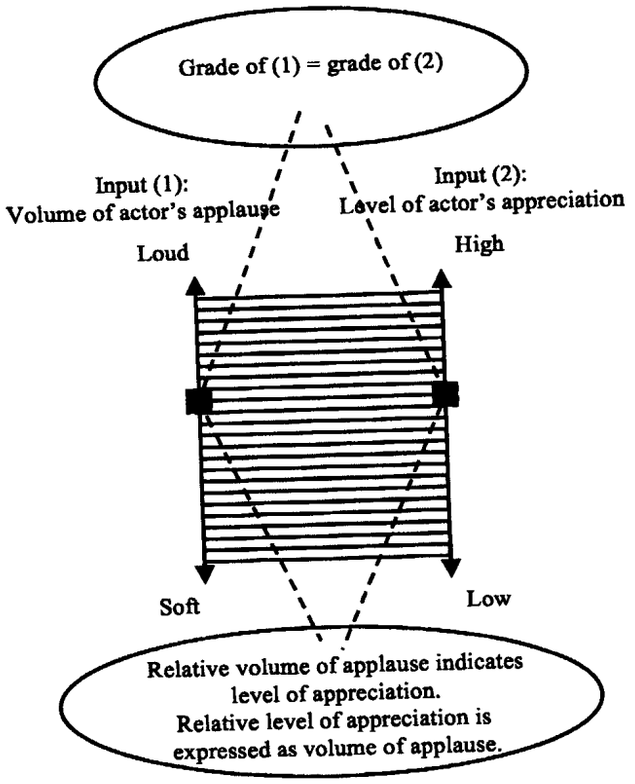

Fig. 3: Cross-space mapping of elements in a 'gradient' blend

gradient meaning regards the 'space' between polar categories (just *how* important, *how* formal, etc.). Cross-space mapping discerns relations that are analogous to each other, the relative position of elements on one continuum being compared and aligned with those on another continuum. This is illustrated by means of an example in Fig. 3, in which the loudness of clapping deemed appropriate to a particular event is aligned with a discernment of the level of appreciation felt by the social actor or with the level of appreciation he or she feels or wishes to express. As already indicated, a different example of the same cognitive activity would be one in which the grade of dress or menu deemed appropriate to a particular occasion is aligned with the social actor's discernment of the level of importance of the occasion. In each case, it is gradient features of the presented data that are discerned by social actors as an analogue of the gradient features of something else with which it is compared. This is the form of cross-space mapping that underlies the discernment of actions and objects as being relatively "fitting", or otherwise, in everyday life (O'Doherty Jensen 2002).

These latter examples also serve to illustrate the fact that bodily gestures and the social uses of material goods function as expressive media of communication that are analogical in character. However, both media can also be used in the manner of words to convey conceptual meanings with reference to given categories. For example, we wave 'goodbye' or eat 'birthday cake'. In these instances bodily gestures and material goods function as expressive media of communication that are symbolic in character and they do so in virtually the same manner as linguistic symbols, the difference being that they are non-verbal symbols. But the cultural importance of the body and material goods as expressive media, it is contended here, is not primarily due to this quasi-linguistic function. Rather, their cultural importance primarily arises from their function as analogical media of communication with respect to gradient meanings. The body and material goods provide wonderfully nuanced analogical media when it comes to expressing *how* and *how much* of any given meaning is at issue. Language, on the other hand, is a wonderfully nuanced symbolic medium for the expression of *what* is meant.

The relevance of *blending* theory to cultural and social studies lies in its presentation of analytical tools whereby the construction, entrenchment, development and modification of categorial and gradient meanings can be analysed. Since meanings in everyday life are frequently constructed by blending inputs from different domains of cultural practice, it should be expected that this feature will be reflected in conventional practices and other entrenched cultural products. What we find as a commonplace observation among anthropologists is that cultural practices, beliefs and symbolic structures in different areas of social life - such as those of kinship, commensality, cuisine and cosmology - are closely interrelated. At the same time, the cognitive underpinnings of these human accomplishments have not been accounted for. Some theorists have contributed to this endeavour, and maintained a conviction that this will be achieved (Douglas 1984:9; Douglas & Isherwood 1996:viii). Others have argued that it cannot be done, and regard the endeavour as mistaken (Archer 1996).

In her attack on what she terms 'The Myth of Cultural Integration', Archer recognises that "closely interwoven patterns" of kinship, cuisine and cosmology are sometimes observed in cultures with primitive belief systems. But, she contends (running a blend in which 'culture' is 'woven textile'): "What cannot be revealed retrospectively is the temporal activity by which strand was knitted with strand." (Archer 1996:172) This task, however, is precisely one of the contributions of *blending* theory, as illustrated for example by Turner's analysis of Geertz's data regarding the cultural significance of the Balinese cockfight (Turner 2001). The view that will be argued here is that *blending* theory, in its somewhat labourious fashion, does offer analytical tools that can be used to unravel the processes whereby meanings are constructed "strand by strand", becoming entrenched within a given culture, whether primitive or otherwise.

The following section of this paper presents case material regarding a cultural convention in Great Britain and the successive interpretations of its meaning as offered by three investigators. In the final section of this paper the attempt will then be made to ground one interpretation of the meaning of this convention, demonstrating in that process one of the ways in which kinship and cuisine are woven together in a modern society.

The 'proper dinner': case material

The meal referred to here as the 'proper dinner' is the traditional form of the main course of the main meal of the day in Great Britain. The colloquial designation seen on cafeteria menus is "Meat and 2 Veg", the latter always referring to potatoes and one other vegetable. The objectives, methods, findings and conclusions of three empirical investigations of this meal are outlined in this section. Social research focussed on the meal as a feature of domestic family life, using the following designations: the "dinner proper" (Douglas & Nicod 1974), the "cooked dinner" or "proper meal" (Murcott 1982) and the "proper dinner" or "proper meal"(Charles & Kerr, 1988). All of these designations, with the exception of the "dinner proper", refer

to informants' categories. These three investigations confirmed that this meal was indeed a key feature of British family life. Nevertheless, each report offered a different account of its meaning and symbolic import. The outline presented here seeks to include all data that illuminate the character of this particular meal as prepared, served and consumed, and to exclude as far as possible all data regarding other aspects of the food system or family life not immediately relevant to the task at hand.

Douglas and Nicod's account: Combination as symbol of social occasion

The UK Department of Health and Social Security financed the first major ethnographic study of British food habits in 1971, the project to be supervised by Mary Douglas and the data collected by Michael Nicod. This study was designed to answer the following questions: (1) What makes a meal recognisably one of a kind? (2) What are the cultural constraints upon food preferences and meal types? (3) What is the relationship between (a) the structuring of food events and (b) social occasions, and between (a) and (c) social relations? Participant observation was selected as the primary method of data collection. The sample comprised four working class families, in which the father was employed in factory labour. No further information about the composition of these families has been made available, the last of the objectives noted above having been dropped from the analysis due to lack of time (Douglas 1983). Nicod resided with each family for a period of one month, posing as a lodger, participating in all meals, and completing his field notes without these families becoming aware of the character of his work. A policy of not addressing any questions to them regarding their food preferences or practices was adopted at an early point in the course of the fieldwork (Douglas & Nicod 1974).

Douglas had been doubtful about the extent to which the structural method adopted in her earlier work could be applied to the analysis of dietary rules in a complex modern society. A shared cosmology could not be assumed in this case and dietary rules would not be explicit, but implicit (Douglas 1983). Structural method had been employed with respect to her analyses of dietary rules among the Lele, a Kasai

tribe in Zaire, and among the ancient Israelites (Douglas 1963, 1966, 1969, 1972). New inspiration with regard to method was drawn from Halliday's suggestions regarding ways in which linguistic concepts ('syntagm', 'paradigm' and 'binary pairs') could be applied to the analysis of sequence in menus (Douglas 1972). The method of analysis employed in this case remained and was termed 'structural'.

The task of distinguishing kinds of food (meat, vegetables, biscuits, bread, etc.) and kinds of social occasion (weekdays and more special occasions such as Sundays, birthdays, etc.) followed the straightforward procedure of identifying the available cultural categories. 'Meals' were distinguished from 'snacks', as concerning rule-bound combinations and sequences of foods consumed and as constituting structured social events, in which time, place and sequence of actions were also prescribed by rules. 'Snacks' on the other hand were defined as unstructured food events, in which one or more items might be served or consumed without regard to any rules prescribing combination or sequence. The analysis was thereafter restricted to revealing the structure of the meal system.

Douglas had earlier suggested, on the basis of unstructured observations, that the structure of a meal in this food system appeared to be a combination of food items comprising three elements, of which one was stressed and two unstressed (Douglas 1972). This hypothesis was confirmed on the basis of the data collected by Nicod with one significant exception. The analysis revealed that four elements should be distinguished for the purpose of describing the structure that was common to all meal types in this food system. These were: a 'centrepiece', a 'staple' element, 'trimmings' and 'dressing'. All four appeared together in only one course of one meal of the day (subsequently termed the 'proper dinner'). It was found that succeeding courses in that meal and all courses in other meals always comprised a centrepiece and a staple element and either trimmings or a dressing, but not both of the latter elements. These differential food-signs provided the criteria by which kinds of meals were identified.

By applying (gradient) criteria of relative complexity, copiousness and ceremoniousness, it was found that the three meal types of this food system were rank

ordered as follows: (A) the main meal, including hot potatoes as the staple of the main course and its accompaniments, (B) the secondary meal, including bread as the staple of main and secondary courses and its accompaniments, and (C) the tertiary meal, comprising biscuits and a hot drink. While the A meal corresponded to the cultural category of 'dinner', the (C) meal by no means corresponded to that of 'breakfast', the data having revealed that breakfast among these families should be classified as an unstructured food event - a snack, as defined.

These three meal types were consumed by the families on Sundays in a temporal order that corresponded to the rank order: an A meal in the middle of the day, a B meal in the early evening and a C meal in the later part of the evening. The sequence on weekdays, however was: B, C, A, B, a B meal being consumed by whoever was home in the middle of the day, and the rest of the meal system being consumed as from the late afternoon following the return home from work of the father of the family. The A and B meals each comprised three courses. The structural characteristics of the B meal replicated those of the A meal in different materials, the second course in each case replicating the first in sweet rather than savoury materials. For example, bread and butter with jam as the centrepiece of the second course of the B meal replicated trifle with cream and fruit as the centrepiece of the second course of the A meal. The last course in each case comprised exactly the same content as the C meal when served on its own. This rhythmic pattern of concluding each meal and each day with a cup of tea and a biscuit was noted as one that provided the meal system with a culturally unambiguous signal that eating had come to an end.

The first and main course of the A meal (the "dinner proper") is that which concerns us here. It was found that while some discretion to duplicate or omit elements was permitted in all other courses of the meal system, the conventions of this course were absolutely strict. The staple element was always a serving of hot potatoes, in contradistinction to cereal as the staple in all other courses of the meal system. Accompaniments were also served hot, the centrepiece being usually meat, served with vegetable trimmings and a dressing of thick brown gravy. Differences between

this course as served on weekdays compared to more special occasions were that on the latter occasions the number of trimmings or dressings were sometimes increased and no departure from meat as the centrepiece ever occurred.

The sculptural and sensory qualities of the food as served in each course of the meal system were identified as central structural characteristics. Among the themes that characterised relations between courses - decreasing scale of quantity, increasing discretion to omit elements, non-reversibility of savoury/sweet order, increasing segregation of liquids and solids, increasing solidity of dressing - from thick gravy, to the thicker custard or cream of the pudding course, to the solid icing of the biscuit - the analysis emphasized the significance of increasing dominance of visual pattern. Visual pattern was least clear in the first and main course of the main meal, an observation that was graphically described as follows (Douglas 1982 [1973]:96):

> "The first course of the main meal is presented in what appears to the uninitiated as a slushy indistinguishable mixture in which it is difficult to distinguish the trimmings and solid dressings from the meat and potatoes under their lavish coat of rich brown gravy."

It was concluded that other sensory qualities of food than that of visual appearance dominated this course of the main meal. The visual appearance of the pudding course in contrast was frequently displayed at the table and first disrupted on serving, while the biscuit maintained its geometric form until eaten (Douglas & Nicod 1974).

The several points of correspondence revealed by this analysis underlay its claim to have revealed the structural characteristics of this meal system, and thereby the cultural constraints on food preferences among its members. Of significance in this regard were the findings that some parts of the system constituted metonyms of the whole, the capacity to recall the whole by the structure of a part being regarded as a defining characteristic of symbolic structures (Douglas 1972; Douglas & Nicod 1974). For example, the sequence, ranking and rules of the three courses of the A meal, served every day, corresponded to the three meals of the food system as served on Sundays. The main meal in the daily cycle could then be said to constitute a

metonym of the potato meal (A), the main cereal meal (B) and the sweet and dry biscuit meal (C), served in that order on the most important day of the weekly cycle, Sunday. In this manner the 'proper dinner', as it was later termed, emerged from this analysis as that part of the food system which constituted the pinnacle of scales of importance and quantity in the daily and weekly cycles of the system, and as the only part in which convention permitted no discretion in regard to rules of combination.

The point of interest in the present context concerns the extent to which this analysis could specify constraints upon the items that comprised this part of the food system. Clear answers were provided with regard to two of its elements, in each case referring to its role in maintaining the structure of the system as such. The reason why potatoes were invariably served was because this item fulfilled a structural requirement (Douglas & Nicod 1974:746):

> "... before seeing the structure laid out, one could have asked reasonably why they never serve potatoes in meal B. The answer now would be that potatoes are the staple for meal A, course one. That part of the pattern would loose its distinctiveness, and the pattern would lose its shape, if potatoes were served in course two or meal two."

Similarly, gravy was seen to be required by the demands of pattern maintenance. Since visual pattern increasingly dominated the order of courses, the relative clarity of this feature was reduced in the first course by the addition of this item. Meat, it was noted, was not an element that differentiated the main course of the main meal, since it was also among the options that served as the centrepiece of the main course of the secondary meal. Its significance in the meal system was nevertheless indicated by its role as centrepiece and the fact that no discretion to omit this item was ever permitted on more important occasions. No reason was offered as to why vegetables were included in the rules of combination, other than that they happened to be the item that filled the structural role of trimmings in this course.

This analysis clearly revealed the combinations of foods that differentially functioned as signs of meal categories, rank ordered meal-types and differences

between everyday and more special occasions. The meaning of the 'proper dinner', according to this analysis, was that it represented the pinnacle of daily and weekly food cycles as well as grades of difference between these events in each cycle. What other meanings it may have had remained open questions. This analysis did not take up the further tasks of structural analysis that had been pursed in Douglas' earlier work, tracing points of correspondence between dietary rules, cosmological beliefs and social relations among the actors at issue.

Nor was it possible to say what light might be shed by a participant perspective upon these rules of combination. This was for the reason that it does not belong to the tasks of structural or structuralist analyses to interpret the meanings of rule-bound symbolic structures as understood from the point of view of social actors. The elucidation of a participant perspective on the rules of the 'proper dinner' was the task later taken up by Anne Murcott (1982, 1983, 1993).

Murcott's account: Preparation as symbol of gender roles

Murcott undertook a study of attitudes to and uses of food among expectant mothers in South Wales in the early 1980s (Murcott 1982, 1983). One report of her findings was devoted to the objective of delineating the 'folk model' of this dinner, that is, a composite picture assembled from data provided by all informants and reflecting their food categories and conceptions of the rules involved (1982). A further report concerned informants' conceptions of their domestic role with particular regard to cooking (Murcott 1983). The findings of the former report are focussed upon here. Data were collected by means of audio-taped interviews undertaken in informants' homes, the duration of which averaged one and a half hours. The primary sample comprised thirty seven expectant mothers between the ages of 16 and 40, almost two thirds of whom were expecting their first child, and twenty of whom were interviewed both before and after the births of their babies.

The composition and role of the 'proper dinner' as described by Douglas and Nicod (but most often referred to by these informants as a "cooked dinner") was

confirmed in this study. Sometimes it constituted a full meal in itself, and sometimes it was preceded by a "starter" course or followed by other courses of food. Disregarding these differences, the informants made it clear that this dinner had a particular salience for them and that they regarded it as a "proper meal *par excellence*" (Murcott, 1982:677). These women, being responsible for the provision of family meals, were in an excellent position to provide detailed accounts of their views on the selection of suitable ingredients, methods of cooking and serving the meal, as well as the circumstances and frequency of its consumption.

The components of the meal were explored and reported item by item. The informants almost invariably mentioned 'meat' as the first item, usually in the generic form, suitable variants being specified subsequently. Only fresh meat from the flesh of the animal was deemed suitable for inclusion, beef, lamb, pork and chicken being the acceptable variants. Offal, preserved or processed products such as liver, bacon or sausages, as well as fish of any kind were not considered suitable for inclusion. Moreover, the meat deemed appropriate to such a dinner should have a form and size that permits a serving of one discrete piece, such as a steak, a chop or joint of chicken, to each participant. These should not be prepared in any manner that might mask their nature. Fat was deemed the proper cooking medium for meat, which should be fried, grilled, baked, roasted or braised. Roasting, it transpired was the proper method on Sundays, since the roasting of a relatively large joint of meat from which slices were carved for each participant was the norm on that particular day of the week.

It was found that 'potatoes' rarely headed the informants' list of items that should be included. But they were never forgotten, being a constant feature of this meal, always itemized separately from other vegetables and always designated in the plural rather than singular form. Questioning on the latter point revealed that 'potato' was a designation that referred to an ingredient or to a method of cooking (as in 'mashed potato'). The 'potatoes' of the cooked dinner, however, were discrete items - prepared whole or in pieces of appropriate size, each having the approximate size of

an egg. The proper cooking method was to peel and boil them in water, except on Sundays when they should be peeled, roasted in the oven and basted in the fat and juices of the joint of meat.

'Vegetables' were also listed initially in the generic form. The rule was that when only one vegetable was provided in addition to potatoes, the only acceptable variants were green vegetables. These included peas, french beans, brussels sprouts or cabbage. Broccoli was occasionally included in the informants' list of appropriate kinds and cauliflower somewhat hesitantly. Other vegetables, such as carrots, parsnip, or turnip, and occasionally tomato or sweetcorn, could only be appropriately included in this meal as an additional vegetable to one of the green variants. All vegetables should be boiled in water, and Sundays did not represent an exception to this rule.

It was also noted that informants placed a remarkable degree of stress on the importance of gravy, claiming it as the item that "made the meal". It also transpired that there was a proper method of preparing this item, all informants being familiar with this method whether or not they resorted to the use of a convenience product in practice. This was done by adding flour to the meat juices and some of its fat, cooking this mixture over a low heat and bringing it to a pouring consistency by the addition of water in which the vegetables had been boiled. In this manner, Murcott noted, the gravy literally and symbolically combined the import of the relationship between the prescribed cooking methods (1982:682).

The definitive characteristic of the dinner as served, according to Murcott, was that it constituted a plateful. All items were drained of their cooking medium and arranged by the cook as dry items on each plate, one for each participant in the meal. Vegetables were served such that they constituted one small pile on one part of the plate, while meat and potatoes were similarly arranged in an adjacent manner. The composition should be such that all three components were simultaneously visible at a glance. They should never be mixed together, piled on top of one another or given any other form than that specified. The gravy should then be added as the final item, being poured over all three items on the plate, and was properly done in a manner that did

not obliterate their character, shape or colour. On this point the accounts provided by Murcott's informants did not at all accord with Douglas and Nicod's characterisation of a "slushy mixture" (Douglas & Nicod, 1974). Instead, these women specified that the items on the plate should never be presented immersed or submerged in gravy. Murcott concluded on this point (1982:683):

> "In this way, gravy, as the fourth and final element not only links together the previous three components and translates them into a coordinated whole, it also emphasizes that this coordinated whole, the cooked dinner, is indeed a plateful."

The plate, according to Murcott, circumscribed the component foods, provided a framework for their location in relation to each other, and constituted a boundary which marked either the limits between courses or that of the meal itself. The character of the dinner as a plateful was identified as the key to understanding her informants' tendency to equate this course of the main meal with a "proper meal" as such.

This meal was unambiguously perceived by these women as one that should be eaten by the assembled members of the family. In practice, this was not always feasible. Nor was dinner always eaten by the assembled members at a dining table. It appeared that simultaneity and contiguity were conceived as ideals to be met, but were not the only ways in which such a meal was shared. However, the plateful prepared for each member ensured that each, sooner or later, here or there, received virtually identical versions. It transpired from these informants that this meal was usually prepared on three or four days of the week, Sundays being marked by the provision of a superior and more expensive variant. Other meals in these households were sometimes solitary events, were eaten in the company of other family members or of casual visitors. But a "proper meal", of which this dinner was the focal point, was seen as a family affair. The phrase "chip meal" was sometimes used by informants to exemplify the kind of dinner provided on days when the 'proper' kind was not prepared. In such a meal, deep fried chips replaced potatoes cooked in the 'proper'

manner, meat could be replaced by fish, sausages or eggs, while baked beans or tomatoes might serve as the vegetable. Meals of this kind, Murcott noted, mimicked the structure of the proper kind. Her informants regarded the practice of serving chips with what was otherwise a 'proper dinner' as a way of cutting corners, some describing it "cheating".

This elucidation of the folk model of the 'proper dinner' confirmed actors' awareness of the procedural rules that had been identified by Douglas and Nicod, and also supplemented the earlier account. We learn that not every variant of 'dinner' is conceived as a 'proper' one, even when its structure resembles the 'proper' kind. We also learn that differences between everyday and special occasions are marked by rules regarding the appropriate use of meat (discrete pieces versus larger joints), vegetables (leaf vegetables versus the supplementary role of root vegetables) as well as potatoes (boiled versus roast). Murcott's interpretation of the meaning and symbolic import of this meal, however, did not focus upon the rules of combination, the selection of components or cooking methods, either as markers of social relations or as constraints on food preferences. However, it would seem that the selection of variants was not regarded as being wholly arbitrary, the point being made that these women selected variants in the light of their husbands' preferences (Murcott,1983, 1993). Leaving aside all other aspects of the composition of the meal itself, the interpretation focussed instead upon the character of these food practises as signifiers of culinary skill and the appropriate use of time among women.

Shopping for fresh ingredients and preparing this meal was women's work, and taken for granted as such by these informants whether these tasks gave them pleasure or were seen as tiresome (Murcott, 1983, 1982, 1993). Doing this work, she concluded, testified to their proper use of time as homemakers, just as their husbands' wage packets testified to men's proper use of time as breadwinners. Moreover, the selection of variants and preparation of platefuls allowed women to take some small account of particular preferences among the members of their families (Murcot, 1982). These practices were seen as reaffirming the place of women in the domestic sphere,

not just as wives, mothers or cooks, but as the woman in a particular family who was in a position to know the preferences of each member (Murcott, 1982). From this perspective, the function of these food rules was seen as that of providing cultural constraints upon the maintenance of a gendered social structure. The question remained whether many other quite different sets of food rules might equally well have served these social functions. This was the perspective pursued in a later study undertaken by Charles and Kerr, who sought to illuminate the question: why *this* meal?

Charles and Kerr's account: consumption as symbol of the family

The overarching objective of Charles and Kerr's study was to examine reciprocal influences between eating habits on the one hand and gender, age and social class on the other. They were inspired by earlier studies of the 'proper dinner' and by the heritage of anthropological investigations more generally, which indicated that food carries messages about social relations, social status and the social occasions on which it is used. The specific objective of central concern here was to answer the question (Charles & Kerr 1988:6):

> ". . . what is it that leads us to eat food put together in the form of a meal consisting of meat and two veg?"

Data were collected by means of personal interviews with two hundred women, each of whom was interviewed twice. During the intervening period of two weeks, the informants kept diary records of the items of food and drink consumed by each member of the household as well as the relative size of individual helpings. Interviews were audio-taped in the informants homes, some lasting several hours. The sample was drawn from a geographical area in the north of England. Most of the women had one or two children, and all of them had at least one child who was under school age. Almost all were married and living with the father of their children. A majority were between the ages of 20 and 34 and had completed their education when they were 15 or 16 years old. Forty per cent were in paid employment, most of whom had part-time,

low status jobs in the service sector. Their husbands' occupations were at all levels of the occupational scale, more than a third being skilled manual workers and just less than a third in professional or managerial occupations. Household earnings varied considerably. The sample being sufficiently large and the interviews having included many open-ended questions, the analysis of data was both quantitative and qualitative.

A central finding of this study was that throughout the class structure women regarded the 'proper dinner' as the key to appropriate eating habits in their families. The results also confirmed earlier findings on a series of points. This meal was prepared by the woman of the household, constituted the main meal of the day, was conceived as one that should be eaten by the assembled family and was not provided every day of the week. The term "proper meal" was also used by this larger sample of informants to refer to the main meal when, and only when, it was the 'proper' kind, comprising meat, potatoes, vegetables and gravy, Sunday dinner comprising these components in the more elaborate form of the roast being identified as the "proper meal *par excellence*". Dinners that were not the 'proper' kind were often referred to as "snack-type meals". These included salads, deemed suitable for a "proper tea", as well as dinners that resembled the structure of the 'proper' kind, but not its components. This latter pattern was more widespread among working class families (for example: sausages and chips with baked beans), "snack-type meals" among middle class families more often deviating from the structure itself (for example: cheese omelette with wholemeal bread and a salad).

This analysis yielded quantitative data regarding the relationship between the composition of the main meal and the social composition of participants. It transpired that there were 132 occasions during the period of data collection on which the father of the family had not been present at the main meal. The meal had departed from its usual composition on 47% of these occasions, most commonly taking the form of not providing a 'proper dinner'. Some informants described the situation as one in which they couldn't be bothered going to the trouble of preparing a proper meal when their husbands were absent, while others described it as one in which greater priority was

given to children's preferences. However, Charles and Kerr observed that the presence of children as well as the father's presence appeared to be necessary conditions for the provision of this meal. Several informants reported that they had only started cooking "proper meals" after their children had been born - the children's ability to share a 'proper dinner' being seen as finally constituting the family as a "proper family". The provision of these meals, Charles & Kerr concluded, appeared to require the presence of the family - father, mother and children - to justify its preparation.

The answer to the question posed at the outset - why *this* meal? - was approached by considering differences between the food preferences of family members. Men were described as having a conservative preference for meat cooked in the traditional manner of the 'proper dinner', and as disliking "sloppy" foods such as pasta or noodle dishes, as well as pizza or salads, if served as a main meal. The food records also revealed that men had a significantly higher consumption of both meat and alcohol than their partners, a pattern partly accounted for by their higher consumption of meat in non-main meals. Twelve per cent of men did some cooking, but only when their partners were prevented from doing so, and when they did, they usually prepared non-main meals or "snack-type" meals.

When asked about their personal preferences, most of the women replied that they did not have particular preferences. This contrasted with the detailed replies regarding likes and dislikes, when asked to describe the preferences of other family members. These women, 88.5% of whom took sole responsibility for cooking on behalf of their families, planned meals with a view to pleasing other family members. When asked what factors they took into account when shopping for food, 73% mentioned their partner's preferences, 63% mentioned those of children, while only 45% mentioned their personal preferences. The qualitative data provided examples of the ways in which the informants set their personal preferences aside on a daily basis, a tendency that confirms Murcott's findings (Murcott 1983, 1993). Their emotional investment in pleasing others was made apparent by reported experiences of feeling hurt when food was rejected, as well as feeling selfish and guilty on occasions when

they took their personal preferences into account. Asked whether they thought they would cook differently if they were living on their own, almost 90% thought that they would make changes. The main changes thought likely to occur were a move away from "proper meals" towards more "snack-type meals", such as soups, sandwiches or salads, and a tendency to eat less meat and more fruit and vegetables.

The usual pattern was that children participated in family meals as from the age of 18 months to two years old, but did not at any age participate in its preparation. Most of the women described their children's eating habits as being problematic in some way, the problems, it appeared, being largely due to the children's reluctance to eat food provided in the form of the 'proper dinner'. Their preferences, it appeared, were for "snack type" meals such as chips with fish-fingers or sausages, or such items as sandwiches, toast, potato crisps, breakfast cereals or raw foods, which could be eaten with fingers or a spoon. In so far as children's socialisation to the norms of the 'proper dinner' gave rise to family conflicts at the dining table, their mothers saw their eating habits as constituting a problem. Their fathers were reported as exerting sanctions. Most informants did not distinguish the nutritional aspects of their children's food preferences from its social aspects, that of joining in the family meal, but nevertheless perceived the consumption of a 'proper dinner' as the means of meeting acceptable standards in both areas.

Family preferences were given as the most important factor taken into consideration in decisions about food provision, other constraints being the relative costs of food and its perceived "goodness". Charles and Kerr concluded that the provision and consumption of "proper meals" in these families reflected relations of status and power within the family, according to which the mother's authority was subordinated to that of the father, while children were subjected to the authority of both. The selection of components in the 'proper dinner', it was pointed out, privileged men's preferences rather than those of women or children. Men's higher status relative to that of women was reflected in their relatively higher level of consumption high-status foods, particularly meat and alcohol. The authority of the

father, they concluded, was reinforced by the provision of this meal, the lesser authority of women by their provision of it and that of children in having to accept what was provided and to learn to eat it in the proper manner. The food habits of families were therefore seen as both reflecting and reproducing the social divisions of age and gender. The 'proper dinner', it was concluded, not only symbolised the family, its provision and consumption constituted it as a "proper family" in accordance with patriarchal norms.

The 'proper dinner': an analysis within the framework of *blending* theory

These three studies share the supposition that food practices constitute an expressive medium of communication, but they reach divergent conclusions with regard to the symbolic significance of the 'proper dinner'. It is found to signify: (1) the high point on scales of social occasion, (2) gendered food practices, with regard to culinary skill, and (3) the family, with regard to gendered and age-specific food preferences and grades of status and power among its members. Douglas and Nicod focus upon explicating the rules of a food system and their analysis and conclusion with regard to social occasions can thus be said to concern *syntactic* aspects of that system (*cf.* Douglas & Gross 1981). Murcott's analysis describes food practices that are experienced as meaningful by social actors, but her conclusion regarding culinary skills focusses on the *pragmatic* context of women's work. That is to say, it regards the users of this medium and the social context of appropriate usage. Charles and Kerr seek to explicate what these food practices mean, and this focus upon *semantic* aspects yields a conclusion to the effect that these practices signify the family. The analytical framework of *blending* theory - and indeed of cognitive semiotics, more generally - would suggest that these divergent conclusions may well regard complementary parts of a larger puzzle, since any meaning constructions expressed in conventional terms will be structured by syntactic rules, constructed or reproduced by some user of that medium within a cultural and social context, and deemed meaningful by those who express it and those who respond to it.

Blending theory introduces some specific suppositions to any further analysis of this convention, and provides a framework which highlights questions that should be raised with a view to explicating its meaning constructions. One supposition is that if these food practices are generated by means of conceptual blending, then neither the composition of the meal nor the many norms associated with its preparation, serving and consumption are generated arbitrarily. Murcott offers detailed data regarding these norms (1982), and her findings raise the question as to whether they are interrelated in some systematic manner. A further supposition is that cross-space mappings underlying this convention are either categorial or gradient in character, or possibly both. A blend based on the former expresses *what* is meant, while one based on the latter expresses *how* and *how much of* any given meaning is at issue. The focus upon grades of occasion in the work of Douglas and Nicod, and upon grades of social status in the work of Charles and Kerr, suggest that gradient mappings may underlie these aspects of food practices. On this point the question for further analysis is whether empirical evidence supports hypotheses to this effect. That evidence would indicate systematic patterns of cross-space mapping between grades of food and grades of occasion, and between grades of food and grades of people, respectively. Both of these issues have been explored elsewhere (O'Doherty Jensen 2002), and will be treated briefly here. Charles and Kerr's claim that the 'proper dinner' signifies the 'proper family' raises the question as to whether categorial mapping may underlie this aspect of these food practices. Here again the issue is whether the empirical evidence supports a hypothesis to this effect. Relevant evidence would regard cross-space mappings between counterpoint elements in a conceptual network based on these inputs, and would regard the extent to which conceptions of 'proper' or 'appropriate' practices can be accounted for in non-arbitrary ways with reference to this blend.

Gradient mappings underlying food practices

If grades of foods and grades of social occasion are mapped onto each other by means

of a gradient blend, this would imply that not only kinds of occasion but also kinds of food are ranged on a gradient continuum or 'scale'. A blend would then discern counterpoint connections between the relative positions of kinds of foods as rank ordered on a culinary scale and kinds of social occasion as rank ordered on a scale of events. We would expect to find a systematic pattern whereby counterpoint connections are discerned between the least prized foods on the culinary scale and the lowest grade of social occasion, between foods and events located at the mid-points of both scales and between the most prized foods and the higher grades of social occasion. Douglas and Nicod did not raise the further question as to whether kinds of foods are graded independently of their specific function as signifiers of occasion. Indeed, exploring this issue would have called for further research.

The available data are somewhat sparse, but they do indicate a pattern in the ways consumers rank order the major foods groups: cereal, vegetable, animal. Surprisingly, it is one that seems to be stable from one society to another. The pattern that has emerged from economic, anthropological and historical research is one whereby cereal products are least prized, pulses, vegetables and fruit occupy a mid-point on a scale of prized foods, while animal products are most highly prized. An analysis of aggregated data regarding demand patterns indicates that this is a global pattern that is not specific to any given society (*cf.* Grigg 1999), although the proportion of the diet that is actually obtained from cereal and animal foods varies considerably. An analysis of norms in Western food cultures further specifies this rank ordering of food groups. Among animal products it has been found that red meats are prized more than the white meats of poultry and fish, and both are prized more than other animal products such as eggs, cheese and other dairy products. At the mid-point of this scale, it has been found that fruit is prized above leaf vegetables, and both are prized more than root vegetables (Twigg 1984). The same observations are supported by historical data indicating that this pattern of rank ordering is not a recent phenomenon (Grieco 1996).

These data not only support the suggestion that food groups are differentially

prized, they indicate less cultural variance with regard to the rank ordering of the major food groups than might have been expected. A hypothesis to the effect that grades of food and grades of social occasion are mapped on to each other assumes a non-arbitrary cross-space mapping of the gradients at issue. This in turn presupposes a stable rank ordering of elements in the relevant inputs, but to what extent that stability is culturally specific or transcultural is an open question. Douglas and Nicod's analysis documents the food signs that signify graded social occasions within one food system. Their findings, however, are also fully consonant with data indicating a transcultural pattern whereby the major food groups are rank ordered. For example, the lowest ranking food products, cereals, appear in all courses of all meals in the British food system with the exception of the main course of the highest ranking meal. The 'staple' of that course is drawn from root vegetables, which occupy a higher point on the culinary scale than do cereals. Vegetables, also drawn from a mid-point on the culinary scale, are accorded the role of 'trimmings', while meat, drawn from the highest point of the culinary scale, is accorded the role of 'centrepiece'. Any exceptions to the latter pattern only occur on lower ranking everyday occasions, never on higher ranking special occasions. Other courses in the meal system provide further evidence of this systematic pattern. Just as meat, drawn from the highest point of the culinary scale, is the centrepiece of the main course of the highest ranking meal, so fruit, drawn from the mid-point of the scale, is the centrepiece of its lower ranking secondary course.

These data support the hypotheses that grades of food are rank ordered and that counterpoint connections between these grades and grades of occasion are indeed discerned. They are also consonant with data indicating that consumers rank order the major food groups in similar ways from one society to another. Further research is called for on both points. It would also seem likely that our food practices would reflect the rank ordering of many products variants within any given food group (for example: fresh fruit, tinned fruit, jam, or minced meat, chopped meat, meat slices, joints, whole animals) in ways that may or may not be specific to a given culture or

sub-culture. It should be expected that economic, social and cultural constraints (as well as cognitive, affective and sensory constraints) exert influence upon the particular rank ordering of specific food products that constitutes one input to any such blends. Consumer research has not much advanced the systematic exploration of these issues since the pioneering work of Douglas and Nicod. However, it should be noted that in so far as a gradient blend regarding counterpoint connections between grades of food and grades of occasion is operative in our everyday lives, it will yield bi-directional inferences. That is to say, given some rank ordering in each input to such a blend, we are enabled to infer the importance of a particular occasion by observations of the menu, just as we are enabled to discern the kind of menu that would be appropriate once we are acquainted with the relative importance of a given occasion.

This view of the matter suggests in turn a different answer to the question of how gender-appropriate food preferences are discerned. Douglas and Nicod took a stand on the view that preferences are dependent variables, influenced by the cultural constraints of the meal system. Charles and Kerr in effect return this precept of the anthropological heritage to square one by treating gendered preferences as independent variables, which influence the meal system. The latter assumption is not valid if gendered preferences are the product of a gradient blend, in which grades of culinary and social status are mapped onto each other. It is, however, likely that economic, social and cultural constraints will influence the culinary status of specific foods, just as these constraints will influence the relative social status of men and women, each of which constitutes an input to this blend. In the event that such a blend is operative, and on the assumption that a higher social status is attributed to men than to women, the systematic pattern we would expect to find is that foods, dishes, courses or meals which occupy a higher position on the culinary scale would be discerned as masculine, while those which occupy a lower position would be discerned as feminine. Once again, inferences would be bi-directional. By preferring foods, dishes, course and meals that occupy a lower position on the culinary scale, women would be enabled to express their femininity. Correspondingly, men would be enabled to

express their masculinity by preferences for foods that occupy a higher position on the culinary scale.

The evidence regarding patterns of gendered food preferences is relatively plentiful. The most thoroughly discussed pattern concerns women's preference for fruit and vegetables as contrasted with men's preference for meat (Bourdieu 1984; Charles & Kerr 1988; Fiddes 1991; Jansson 1993; Adams 1994; Fürst 1995, Lupton 1996). A review of a wide range of empirical studies concluded that women also have a distinct preference for the white meats of poultry or fish, for dairy products such as yoghurt and cottage cheese, as well as for sweet products such as biscuits, chocolates and puddings. They are also content to regard salads, omelettes, soups, vegetarian dishes and sandwiches as dishes that can comprise a main meal for their personal consumption. Men on the other hand have a distinct preference for alcohol, espècially beer and the stronger spirits, all meat products, especially red meats, as well as potatoes. Nor are they generally content to regard the range of dishes favoured by women as ones that can suitably comprise a main meal (O'Doherty Jensen & Holm 1999). It is significant that both men and women agree in their discernments of which foods are 'masculine' and which 'feminine', but they do not agree on reasons why this is so (Lupton 1996).

There is a systematic pattern at issue here. In each case, the foods preferred by men, and which both women and men discern as being 'masculine', occupy a point on the culinary scale that is, so to speak, one step higher up than those preferred by women, and which are correspondingly deemed to be 'feminine'. The pattern regards: the composition of main meals as contrasted with secondary meals (sandwiches, salads), the main course of that meal as contrasted with secondary courses (soup or fish and fruit or pudding), the centrepiece of the main course as contrasted with its trimmings (vegetables), meat products as contrasted with other animal products (eggs, dairy products), red meats as contrasted with white meats (poultry) and alcohol as contrasted with non-alcoholic beverages. This systematic pattern indicates that gendered preferences are not generated arbitrarily, but are the product of a blend in

which counterpoint connections are discerned between grades of culinary and social status. The fact that this pattern of gendered preferences is not specific to a specific culture lends further weight to the view that the major food groups, as well as men and women, are rank ordered in similar ways from one society to another. Similarly, although the evidence will not be explored here, it can be supposed that the social pattern whereby women have developed culinary skills in domestic settings, as compared to their relative lack of success commercial settings, is reproduced by means of a gradient mapping in which lower ranking forms of unpaid labour are deemed appropriate to lower ranking categories of people (*cf.* O'Doherty Jensen & Holm 1998).

In this light we can approach the issue of the symbolic import of the 'proper dinner'. The signifying functions of food practices have been conceived thus far in this analysis as analogical rather than symbolic in character. That is to say, we have been concerned with gradient blends, cross-space mappings in which the relative positions of entities ranged on two or more continua or 'scales' are discerned as analogues of each other thereby giving rise to bi-directional inferences. As such, the 'proper dinner' would seem to be heavily charged with gradient meanings, representing as it does a high point on scales of relative culinary and social importance. We have yet to account for why precisely *this* meal is conceived as being the 'proper' kind, and whether it has symbolic meaning in the sense that it denotes, stands for or represents something else.

A categorial blend underlying food practices

Some few disparities in the available data and analyses regarding the 'proper dinner' call for comment. One major disparity, already noted, concerns the role attributed to food preferences within the analytical frameworks of these studies. Following from the argument in the previous section, men's food preferences cannot be regarded as the explanatory factor in seeking to account for this conventional meal. The substantive argument in this regard is that the same patterns of gendered food

preferences and status positions, identified by Charles and Kerr, are also identified in other societies, in which somewhat different conventions are found with regard to meal composition. Gendered preference and social status cannot be regarded therefore as sufficient conditions for the construction of the conventional 'proper dinner'.

Although Charles and Kerr's suggestion that the 'proper dinner' symbolises the 'proper family' will be taken up for analysis, their reasons for making this suggestion are here assumed to be mistaken and their account inadequate. Rather, the reason why their suggestion is taken as indicating a potentially fruitful hypothesis regards the social composition of participants in this meal. The fact that informants unambiguously perceived this meal as one that should be eaten by the assembled family (Murcott 1982), and that the presence of both parents and children was called for to justify its preparation (Charles & Kerr 1988), indicate that the social composition of participants is significant with regard to the meaning of this particular meal. Douglas and Nicod sadly lacked time to analyse their data on this issue, but elsewhere Douglas has persuasively argued the view that any account of symbolic structure must be able to identify correspondence between the symbolic and social categories at issue (1972). For these reasons the hypothesis that the composition of the dinner and the family, respectively, constitute inputs to a blend is taken up for analysis.

A further point that seems to be inadequately accounted for in these analyses concerns reasons why precisely *this* meal should have a particular salience for women. Murcott addressed the issue by focussing in general terms upon some of the satisfactions that accrue to the domestic role of women, but without advancing our understanding of any reasons why women should conceive this meal as "a proper meal *par excellence*" (1982). Nor do Charles and Kerr elucidate why their informants had the same conception, why they should regard this meal as the key to appropriate eating habits in their families, while being more than willing to abandon it if living on their own. It is also far from clear why these women should maintain this conception of appropriate eating habits despite conflicts at the dining table, given their emotional

investment in pleasing others and their willingness to take the preferences of others into account. The ascertainment of a male preference for meat does not contribute greatly to our understanding of these issues.

There are also some minor disparities between these accounts regarding the frequency with which this meal is consumed and the frequency with which meat constituted its 'centrepiece', whether the meal should be regarded as comprising three or four components, and differences between the descriptions of its visual appearance. Disparity in regard to frequency would seem to be accounted for by the likelihood that not all dinners served each day to Nicod were conceived as being the 'proper' kind, although exhibiting the structure of that kind. Charles and Kerr's data revealed that the latter pattern was usual in working class families. Regarding the number of components, it is noteworthy that one component, gravy, has the special status of being an item that is added to the main components, and is a bi-product of their ingredients. Douglas' description of the resulting dish as a "slushy mixture" when presented to the eye of the uninitiated conveys something of what must be the horror and surprise of the anthropologist on being confronted with an unfamiliar dish, which she or he is expected to consume. It accords poorly, however, with Charles and Kerr's findings that this same dish is prevalent and familiar throughout the British class system. It is possible that a middle class preference for thin rather than thickened gravy contributed to an element of surprise and to the choice of descriptive terms or that the search for structure and the need to convey grades of difference with regard to visual clarity admitted some slight exaggeration in the use of these terms. At any rate, Douglas and Nicod's attribution of significance to the relatively unclear visual appearance of the 'proper dinner' will not be followed in this analysis.

The hypothesis explored here is that the 'proper dinner' is the product of a conceptual blend in which the social composition of the prototypical family is mapped on to the composition of the meal and its prototypical components, yielding inferences with regard to 'proper' and 'appropriate' culinary practices. A 'prototype' in this context refers to the internal structure of a given category, whereby one or more

category members are discerned as being better exemplars of that category than are other members - the prototype being the better or best exemplars (Lakoff 1987). Thus, there are many kinds of 'family' and many kinds of 'dinner', but the discernment of a specific one as being the 'proper' kind in contradistinction to all others, indicates that prototypes are at issue in this meaning construction.

Given the social composition of participants in the meal, it is an easy task to 'unpack' this blend with regard to the structure of the family prototype at issue. This is the nuclear family comprising a father, mother and children, and these social categories can be taken as constituting the elements in one input to this blend (see Fig. 4). On the assumption that this conceptual network is constructed by means of cross-space mapping between counterpart elements in each input, we should therefore regard this dinner as comprising three main components. Given this assumption, it becomes clear that the composition of the meal is such that its components do correspond to the elements in the family prototype with regard to both number and quantity.

Three food categories comprise the dinner, just as three social categories comprise the family. There is one piece of meat, one small pile of vegetables and an unspecified plurality of potatoes corresponding to the counterpart elements of one father, one mother and an unspecified plurality of children. It would seem that a gradient mapping is at issue in so far as these three food and social categories are discerned as corresponding to each other. Charles and Kerr's data document a rank ordering of social status within the family, whereby most status is attributed to the father, less to the mother and least to children. The selection of components in the 'proper dinner' can be accounted for as a mapping in which grades of social status attributed to family members correspond to grades of culinary status attributed to foods, most culinary status being attributed to meat and less to vegetables and, within

the latter category, more culinary status is attributed to leaf vegetables than to root vegetables (Twigg 1984). It is noteworthy that the latter subordinate categories are frequently conflated in everyday uses of the term 'vegetables'. The traditional division of labour in the nuclear family according to which adult men are breadwinners, yields a category of 'dependents', whereby the categories 'women' and 'children' are correspondingly conflated in many social contexts. It would seem that the need to maintain a clear boundary between kinds of vegetables as ranged on a gradient scale is the factor underlying the discernment of leaf vegetables as being the 'proper' kind with respect to inclusion in this meal. Given the role of potatoes in this blend, a clear boundary and gradient difference is maintained in this conceptual network by excluding all other root vegetables from the kind of 'vegetables' that appropriately fill the role of trimmings in a 'proper dinner'. A gradient mapping would also seem to be

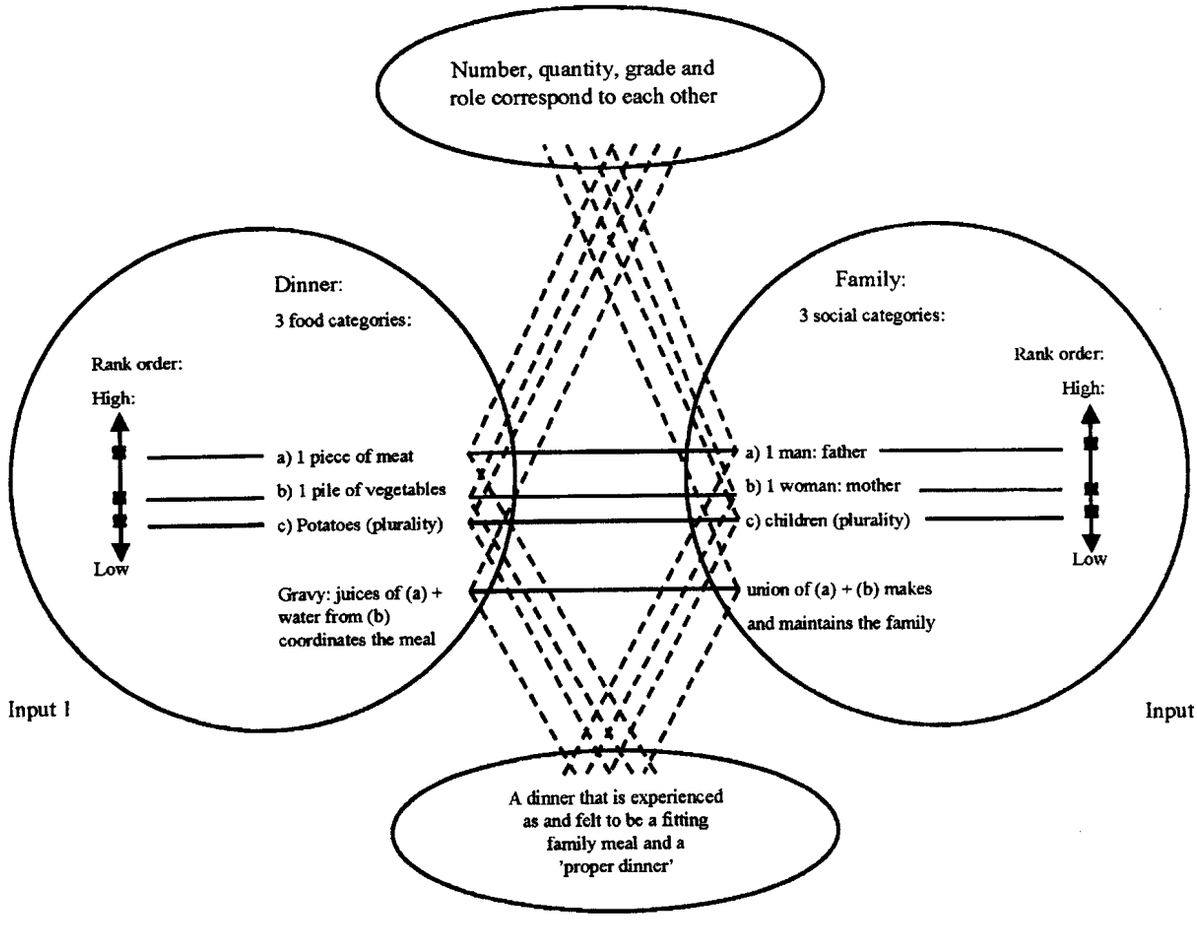

Fig. 4: Gradient and categorical cross-space mappings in the blend underlying the 'proper dinner'

at issue in the selection of fat as the appropriate cooking medium for meat, and water as that appropriate to vegetables, given the relatively higher culinary status traditionally attributed to fat as a cooking medium (Fischler 1992).

We have yet to account for the selection of suitable variants, the addition of gravy, as well as characteristic differences between the weekday and Sunday version of this meal, as aspects discerned within this conceptual network. Given the emphasis placed by informants on shape, size, colour, the importance of fresh ingredients, and the need to prepare and serve each component in a manner that does not mask its nature (Murcott 1982), it would seem that the selection of suitable variants regards the prototype of each of the three food categories that comprise a 'proper dinner'. These aspects of discernment are poorly illuminated by consumer research, but it would seem likely that 'meat' from the flesh of animals and 'vegetables' that are green would be characteristics of prototypical variants of meat and vegetables, respectively. It will be remembered that Murcott's informants were hesitant about including cauliflower in their list of variants. While this variant clearly belongs to vegetables that grow above ground, as distinguished from root vegetables, it is not its edible part that is green. The quality of freshness has been explored in a qualitative study of conceptions of prototypical foods among Danish men. It was found that fresh rather than processed variants were discerned as prototypes of their kind, potatoes being one of the foods included in this study (Halkjær 1999). The goal of not masking their nature is undoubtedly best achieved in the case of potatoes by preparing and serving them whole. Moreover, given the function of this component as the counterpart element to children in the prototypical family, whole potatoes of somewhat varying size as compared to each other and as observed through the course of passing seasons might be thought to make a satisfying contribution to the visual image presented by the composition of this dinner. After all, there is an appropriate size at stake on this point, such that potatoes which are "too big" are given an appropriate size (Murcott 1982). The image presented by a whole piece of meat, a green vegetable and whole potatoes would seem to be a presentation of prototypical characteristics and clear category

boundaries in a manner that could not be achieved by, let us say, a serving of tripe, parsnips and mashed potato.

Gravy is added to this composition, not as a fourth kind of food, but as a product made by combining ingredients from two of its components (meat juices and fat from its cooking medium mixed with water in which the vegetables have been cooked). These are the two components that correspond to the counterpart elements of father and mother in the family prototype. The contribution of this additional item to the dinner is to render its three separate and adjacent components a coordinated whole, just as the union of a man and woman produces their family and the relationship between them maintains it as a coordinated unit. Given the character of the inputs to this network, we can appreciate why gravy might be experienced as a particularly satisfying addition to this meal and even why informants might attribute significance to it as the item that "makes the meal". In so far as conceptual blending is operative, assertions of this kind cannot be interpreted as resting upon a culinary discernment only. Each plate provides a boundary for the three main components of the 'proper dinner' and renders them visible at a glance, linked together by the addition of gravy, just as the home provides a boundary for the nuclear family, while its dining table assembles each member, rendering them visible to each other at a glance, joined together for the purpose of consuming this meal.

Changes made in the 'proper dinner' on Sundays as compared to weekdays exemplify practices arising non-arbitrarily within the process of 'running' this blend. The practice of attributing greater significance to meat on Sundays and that of admitting extra vegetables to the meal (so long as they rank below the green prototype), have counterparts with regard to the social relations of its participants. In these families, the father is absent from the home on weekdays, but home with his family on Sundays, and on that day members of the extended family are sometimes invited to dine (Charles & Kerr 1988). But perhaps the most telling point is the treatment accorded to potatoes on Sundays as compared to weekdays. Potatoes, corresponding to 'children' as their counterpoint in the blend, change their cooking

medium. Just as children are minded by their mothers on weekdays, potatoes share the cooking medium of vegetables on weekdays. On Sundays, however, they are transferred to the cooking medium of meat and basted in its juices.

On the supposition that the 'proper dinner' is constructed by means of cross-space mappings in a conceptual network, in which the prototypical family constitute an input space, both the culinary and social norms associated with its preparation and consumption are rendered comprehensible. That is to say, they loose their quality of being interesting descriptions of somewhat exotic practices, and can be understood as arising non-arbitrarily from the meaning construction in this blend. No discretion is allowed in regard to rules of combination for the reason that cross-space mappings within this conceptual network would be cancelled by the elimination or addition of any components. For the same reason, we can appreciate why the ritual consumption this meal within the nuclear family would be experienced as being deeply meaningful, and vulnerable to losing its point if members are absent. The character of the blend enables us to appreciate why precisely *this* meal would have a particular salience for homemakers and breadwinners, and why they might feel it to be a matter of some importance that their children should be socialised to accept it.

From one point of view, the meaning of this consumption ritual is indeed that it represents the 'proper family'. The conceptual network underlying the 'proper dinner' is an example of a 'single-scope' network. As we saw in the first section of this paper, this is the same kind of network that typically underlies a metaphorical statement. In this instance, the elements in one input - here: the prototypical family - have also provided all of the framing structure to the blend - here: number and quantities of elements, their role and location on a gradient scale. It is the discernment of counterpoint connections between the inputs to such a network that underlies our assessments of the aptness of a metaphor when it is stated by means of language (*cf.* Brugman 1990, Lakoff 1990, Turner 1996, Cox & Theilgaard 1997). But metaphor can also be expressed non-verbally. A set of conventional social practices can be said to constitute a 'performative metaphor', which is expressed in actions rather than

words, and which we discern as being a proper or appropriate way of acting (O'Doherty Jensen 2002). This discernment also rests on there being counterpoint connections between the inputs to a blended space and, as I have tried to demonstrate, the nuclear family provided the structure for the conceptual blend that yields the 'proper dinner'. From another point of view, however, we can also say that the meaning of this consumption ritual is to help to constitute a 'proper family'. A metaphor of this kind is often used to influence the state of affairs it represents (Sweetser 2000). On this basis, I submit that blending theory has an important contribution to make to the analysis of cultural conventions, not least to the tasks of understanding the constructions of meaning whereby culture and social structure, cuisine and kinship, are interrelated in the practices of everyday life.

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